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retro GAMER

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THE RETROBATES

WHAT SIDE WERE YOU, SEGA OR NINTENDO?

DARRAN JONES

I saw myself as a Sega fan growing up, but my large collection of N64, SNES, Wii, GBA and DS games now tells a different story.
Expertise:
Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine
Currently playing:
Mystical Ninja Starring Goemon
Favourite game of all time:
Strider

DREW SLEEP

Despite starting school at around 1996, the 16-bit wars were stil raging on the playground. My mates were Mega Drive kids, and I was no different – though my brother had a SNES, so I was a bit of a double agent.
Expertise:
Looking after **RG**'s office chilli plant
Currently Playing:
Fire Emblem: Three Houses
Favourite Game of all time:
Final Fantasy VIII

NICK THORPE

I was a Sega kid, and practically every console owner I knew had a Mega Drive or Master System, too. When I visited my cousin out of town and played the SNES with him, it felt criminal!
Expertise:
Owning five Master Systems (I sold two)
Currently playing:
Sega Heroes
Favourite game of all time:
Sonic The Hedgehog

ANDY SALTER

I had a Mega Drive, Mega-CD and 32X growing up, so no surprise I'm definitely team Sega. The SNES may have had its extra colours and Mode 7, but it didn't have *Shining Force* or *Lunar*.
Expertise:
Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
Currently playing:
Kenshi... again!
Favourite game of all time:
Rome: Total War

IAIN LEE

Sega. The Dreamcast was just the perfect console. A beautiful machine that I still go back to a lot!
Expertise:
Buying overpriced stuff on eBay then never touching it
Currently playing:
Wreckfest
Favourite game of all time:
Elite (BBC Model B)

PAUL DRURY

I was still happily playing on my C64 when both the Mega Drive and Super Nintendo came out, but when I did take the console plunge, it was a second hand SNES with *Pilotwings* and I've been on Ninty's side ever since.
Expertise:
Martyn Carroll's lost ponytail
Currently playing:
Dreams
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space

PAUL ROSE

Nintendo! Because only Nintendo had Nintendo games.
Expertise:
Winging it
Currently playing:
Two Point Hospital
Favourite game of all time:
Half-Life 2

MARTYN CARROLL

Nintendo. Well, you couldn't play *Mario*, *Zelda* and *F-Zero* on a Mega Drive, could you?
Expertise:
Sinclair stuff
Currently playing:
Baggers In Space
Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy

GRAEME MASON

Sega. I love the Mega Drive and its awesome arcade conversions. Plus the games felt more grown up.
Expertise:
Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver
Currently playing:
Space Invaders 95
Favourite game of all time:
Resident Evil 4

LOADING...

There have been clashes over game systems for as long as I can remember. From the moment I owned an Amstrad I quickly learned that I was inferior to my C64 and Spectrum-owning peers, and would be teased relentlessly because of it. That rivalry seemed to reach a peak with the arrival of the 16-bit systems, and while console one-upmanship continues to this day it seldom feels as vicious as it was while the Mega Drive and SNES were duking it out.

You've only got to read the magazines of the time on both sides of the pond to see how much disruption there was during this period, whether it was readers gleefully sharing mutilated pictures of Mario and Sonic, or companies like Sega using adverts to declare statements like 'Genesis does what Nintendont' in the United States. Console ownership has always been tribal, but it felt hugely entrenched during the late Eighties and early Nineties, and now it looks like it was largely intentional.

This month's cover feature goes behind the scenes and reveals just what Nintendo and Sega were up to during their tumultuous tussle for console supremacy. Tom Kalinske and Mike Hayes, who worked at Sega and Nintendo respectfully, are just a few of the people we've quizzed about this fascinating period that saw two tribes go to war. So grab some popcorn and enjoy the ride.

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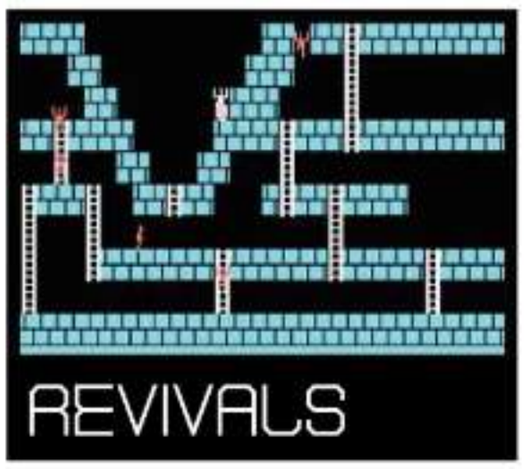

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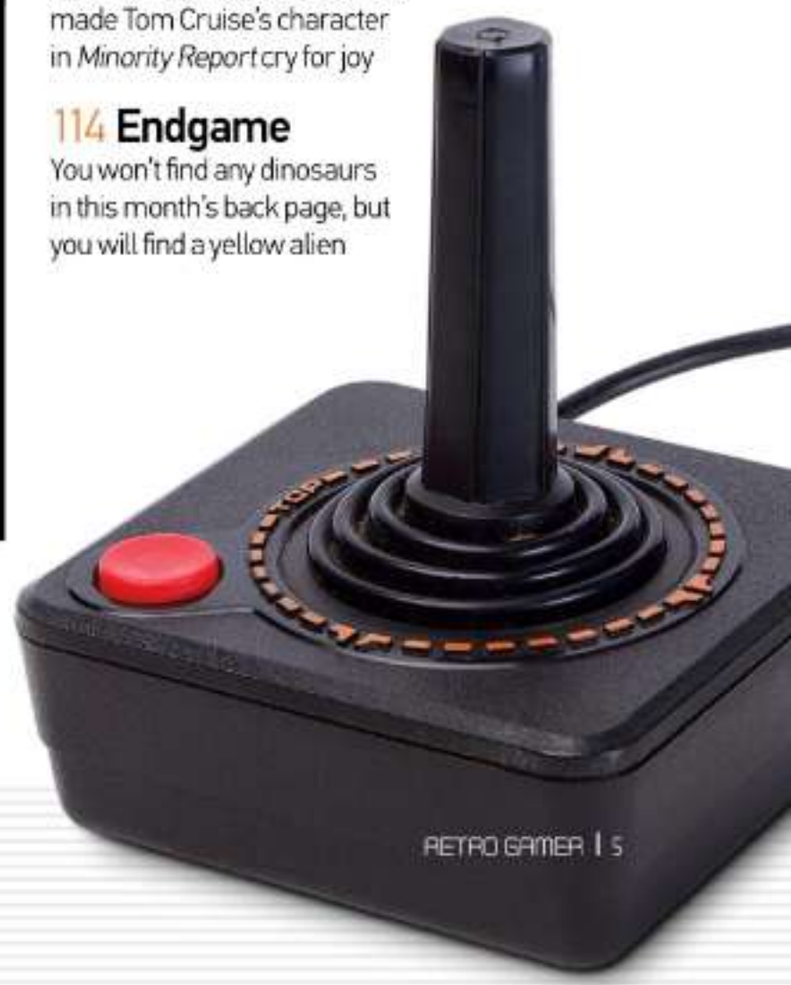

* The latest project from Chris Wilkins and Roger Kean is dedicated to the silly exploits of Rare's Jetman.

REIGNITING JETMAN

Roger Kean and Chris Wilkins on resurrecting Crash's classic comic strip

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Paul remembers a fated encounter with an arcade game in Calais

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Our resident Technomancer drops into April 2003 and brings news of a... mobile phone/games console hybrid? Madness!

If you're a regular follower of retro projects on Kickstarter you'll know that *Jetman – The Complete Published Works* has effortlessly sailed past its £10,000 crowdfunding goal, and is due to be published later this year. Essentially a collection of all the hilarious comic strips by the late John Richardson that appeared in *Crash* magazine, it looks like it will be a fitting tribute for the once-popular Rare character Jetman. Chris Wilkins and Roger Kean reveal everything you need to know about this new project.

* Roger Kean has worked on many projects with Chris Wilkins, including the *Crash* and *Zzap!64* annuals.

Why revisit *Jetman* now?

Roger Kean: In the past couple of years working on the *Crash* annuals, I was exposed to the lunacy of *Jetman*, again and it simply occurred to me that a collected version in print would be a good idea.

Chris Wilkins: I was minding my business one evening, probably putting the latest *Fusion* mag together, and Roger messaged me and said, 'Look at this,' and sent me an attachment. It was effectively a PDF book, with a cover, back page, intro and 96 pages of *Jetman*. Roger had scanned all the comic strips in over a week, tidied them all up, which he is an expert at, and put them all together as a book. I was like, 'Okay Roger, what do we do with this?'

How difficult has it been to sort out the rights to the character?

RK: Rights in comic strips from the past are always complicated. *Jetman* was commissioned by Tim Stamper of Ultimate specifically for *Crash*, and in paying John Richardson the rights passed to Ultimate, so in a sense later to Rare and now Microsoft. So in that sense it's pretty much an open matter. Clearly, Microsoft/Rare owns the Ultimate Play The Game logo.

CW: As I was asking Future for permission to produce the next *Crash* and *Zzap* annual for 2021, I asked if they were okay with us producing a book solely on the *Jetman* comic strip. The approval for *Crash* and *Zzap* came back quite quickly – Future had to think a little bit longer for *Jetman* as this was new territory. The reply came back a few days later as yes. I had a contact at Rare that I had been in touch with a number of years before – I showed him the PDF and asked just before Christmas if we could have permission to produce the book. Rare got back in touch with a yes, with just a little disclaimer to put inside, and they also wanted to check the editorial content.

> **"John Richardson never played Jetpac or Lunar Jetman"**
> Roger Kean

» The *Jetman* Kickstarter has a number of interesting perks. One of our favourites is this funky cushion.

Has there been any involvement with John Richardson's family?

RK: I spent an age trying to track down John Richardson, who disappeared from the comic strip scene before his presumed death. There's not even any online mention of him beyond the sale of original boards for strips like *Tailpipe Tina* at the Illustrator's Art Gallery – Book Palace – and skeleton biographies.

How much of John's character was in the original *Jetman* strip?

RK: He never played *Jetpac* or *Lunar Jetman*. Indeed, he never played any games, so he made up the story from the bare facts given to him by Ultimate. In a *Crash* interview he 'suspected' that there was a great deal of himself in the character – a kind of paranoia since the central theme of Jetman is that everyone is constantly trying to get rid of him, preferably permanently.

Did you work with John?

RK: John never had any personal contact with *Crash*, and his monthly contribution turned up always on time (except once!), sent on as a print-ready bromide from Tim Stamper at Ultimate.

How have you found revisiting the strips?

RK: The zany sense of humour feels as relevant today as it did then. In its own way, *Jetman* is a classic comic strip.

What challenges do you face recreating classic comic art for a new book?

RK: Not having access to the bromides – they're long lost – and having never had the original boards, everything has had to be scanned from printed copies of *Crash*. The black-and-white strips didn't really pose any problems. The later colour ones, which were printed on web-offset paper – not the best quality! – were often a bit out of register. They had also been reduced in scale in the thinner 'pamphlet' *Crash* issues. This presented a problem with the text balloons when the black was under-shadowed by offset cyan, yellow and magenta echoes, and required a deal of work in Photoshop to correct them as best as possible.

> **"The zany sense of humour still feels relevant today. In its own way, Jetman is a classic comic"**
>
> Roger Kean

Were you tempted to create a new story? Is Oli Frey doing any work for the new book?

RK: Oli Frey drew a new page for the first *Crash* annual (2019) from a storyline I wrote. We're planning two further new pages to attempt to give a natural conclusion to the book, which the original didn't have due to Europress having no interest in renewing the arrangement with the Stampers when they took over publishing the magazine.

Why do you think *Jetman* remains so popular with fans?

RK: Principally, the humour of the strip stands out. But perhaps there's also a sly sense of awe (maybe even admiration) in those who originally read it back in the Eighties for such an august software house as Ultimate Play The Game being entirely relaxed about having the piss taken out of their most important game hero? ✱

» *Jetman* made his debut in the sixth issue of *Crash*. His last appearance in the magazine was issue 93.

» *Jetman* had a delightfully silly sense of humour, and John Richardson's monthly strips rarely disappointed readers.

» *Jetman – The Complete Published Works* is estimated to arrive in May. We're looking forward to it.

retroradar THE VAULT

THE COOL RETRO STUFF THAT WE'VE HAD OUR EYE ON THIS MONTH

Japansoft: An Oral History

This latest lavish tome from Read Only Memory is actually a re-edited digest of **Retro Gamer** contributor John Szczepaniak's *The Untold History Of Japanese Game Developers* series. The 332-page book has been edited by Alex Wiltshire and broken down into sections, which immediately helps make it more accessible than the original dense Q&A format. It's an interesting read for anyone that loves the games of Japan.

Price: £30
From: readonlymemory.vg

Xeno Crisis Soundtrack

As well as being one of the best top-down shooters on the Mega Drive, *Xeno Crisis* also sports a rather superb soundtrack which has been recorded at 16-bit, 96kHz for added authenticity. The 19-track CD covers a wide range of musical styles and features all the key music from each stage, including the exhilarating boss tunes. A vinyl version also exists and costs an extra £15.

Price: £10
From: shop.bitmapbureau.com

R-Type III and Super R-Type Collector's Edition

This officially licensed SNES cartridge from Retro-Bit is certainly worth seeking out. Both titles have been included on a single cartridge, and while the new menu that appears on boot-up is nothing to write home about, the two included games are incredibly solid. *R-Type III: The Third Lightning* is easily the highlight of the pack, mainly because the original version now sells for silly amounts of cash, but *Super R-Type* is still worthy of your time, slowdown and all. This new collector's pack is finished off with two lithograph cards, a certificate card, enamel pins and stickers. Plus, it's all housed in a rather lovely box.

Price: £44.99
From: amazon.co.uk

Arcade Game Typography: The Art Of Pixel Type

This delightful little tome is low on substance but high in style. It highlights how a large number of fonts have been recreated with the limited 8x8 grids that were available to pixel artists during the Seventies, Eighties and Nineties. The end result is a visually dynamic book, which is enhanced by great images of many of the featured games, their entire font list in pixel form and insightful snippets of info from author Toshi Omagari.

Price: £19.99
From: amazon.co.uk

Videogames Presentation Pack

Although Royal Mail's limited edition packs (limited to 2,500 sets) have long since sold out, you can still get your hands on this lovely set of commemorative stamps. This alternative presentation pack features brilliant stamp recreations of *Elite, Sensible Soccer, WipEout, Dizzy, Populous, Micro Machines, Lemmings* and *Worms*. Additionally, this special pack also includes a miniature sheet of stamps that showcases the exceptional videogame career of Lara Croft.

Price: £14.25
From: postofficeshop.co.uk

You're calling it what?

Q*bert's Warren Davis chats to us about writing his new autobiography

Warren Davis may have left the games industry back in 2010, but he clearly hasn't forgotten his time working in it. In a brand-new autobiographical book, Warren discusses everything from working on *Q*bert*, to his spell at Disney. Here he tells us how it all came to be.

Why did you decide to write *You Can't Call It @!#?@!?*
I'd been attending Comic Cons and retro gaming shows for a few years, telling a variety of stories about my career, and I was struck by how many stories there were to tell, and that people seemed genuinely interested in them. At some point, it occurred that there was probably enough material for a book.

Has it been challenging to make?
Once I decided, I spent a couple of years just thinking about starting it before I actually started it. So yes, challenging would be an apt description. After I got my first entire chapter written, I decided to set a goal of a chapter a month.

» Warren's *Us Vs Them* is covered in his book, and also featured in **Retro Gamer** issue 195.

Was it painful writing about the time you lost out on $100,000 in *Q*bert* royalties?
Time heals all wounds. It was almost 40 years ago – I've gotten over it. But even back then, it didn't sting as much as you might think. I was so thrilled to have the opportunity to make videogames, and I had enough of a salary to live comfortably.

How does it feel being associated with the iconic *Q*bert*?
It's a huge honour. Making that game was a learning experience for me – it was my first (in that I was in charge of it and responsible for it). I was surprised and grateful that it was so successful in its day, but never did I consider in my wildest visions of the future that it would be remembered so many years later. It's truly been a gift.

What advice would you give to other developers interested in writing their memoirs?
I'd say, 'Go for it!' A lot of the history of early videogame development is being written by people who weren't there and are interpreting stories they've heard, sometimes incorrectly. I have seen so much inaccurate information about the development of *Q*bert* out there, and writing the book was one way to combat it.

The book highlights your love of programming. Are you still just as passionate today?
Pretty much. I don't consider myself a perfectionist, in that I don't expect anything I do to be perfect, but I think perfection should always be one's goal, and I always strive to achieve it. As for my love of programming… I think it's connected to a desire for order in a chaotic world. Code can be complex, but it's also very logical and orderly. There's something immensely pleasing about an algorithm or piece of code that works as intended. It's like solving a puzzle.

» One of the great aspects of *You Can't Call It @!#?@!* is its behind-the-scenes access.

> **"I have seen so much inaccurate information about the development of Q*bert out there"**
> Warren Davis

What was Disney like to work at?
Disney was a mixed bag, in that I was originally hired to make games, but by the time I arrived, they'd decided not to engineer any games in-house, but rather to hire external developers. So I ended up in a 'tools' group, writing support tools for the in-house producers and artists. What I loved about it was just working for Disney, a company I'd always admired. I loved being able to wander around their studio and take in the history of the place. I loved seeing screenings of films on the Disney lot and running into famous people at the commissary.

You left the games industry in 2010. Have you ever been tempted to return?
On the one hand, no. The industry has evolved into a completely different animal from what it was when I started out, and I'm okay not being a part of it. I feel like I've made my contributions and I have other interests which I like to pursue. But on the other hand, there are always ideas kicking around in my head that I wouldn't mind exploring. ✱

You can buy You *Can't Call It @!#?@!* by visiting bit.ly/qbertbook.

» Q*bert went on to have a cameo in Disney's *Wreck It Ralph* and appears in a deleted scene in the second movie.

Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance broadcaster who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. He currently hosts *The Late Night Alternative* show at weekdays from 10pm on www.talkradio.co.uk and runs daily retro streams on www.twitch.tv/iainlee.

I'm a loser, baby

This column is turning into a monthly confessional, a safe space where I basically tell you I am woefully underqualified to write in the hallowed pages of the mighty Retro Gamer. I'm afraid these 500-odd words are no different.

I have never completed a videogame. It dawned on me a few weeks ago. The idea just popped into my head. I thought about it for a while. 'This couldn't be true. Surely at some point over the last 40 years I'd got to the end of something?' I searched my memory banks but could not recall one finish screen, one congratulatory message, nothing that told me I had successfully ended a game.

At the age of 46, I became determined to right that wrong. Not only that, I would do it in front of an audience. My Twitch channel would be the place, and the game would be Speccy classic *Saboteur*, which I had downloaded onto my Switch a while ago. I confidently entitled the stream 'I complete a game for the first time ever' and set to work.

The 100 or so people that joined me that night weren't very encouraging. Some of them called me a liar, simply unable to believe that I had NEVER finished ANY game EVER in my pathetic LIFE. A few suggested that maybe *Saboteur* was a little too hard for my obviously limited gaming skills, but I did not pay attention to their cruel words. No one was going to ruin this very special moment for me. They'd see just how good I was, what I was capable of. Daddy would be proud of me.

Turns out they were right. *Saboteur* is well hard. I just couldn't get my head around it. I kept dying. It was the dogs, mainly. I don't think you can attack them, which seems a little unfair.

After a few hours I started to watch a walkthrough on YouTube. A few viewers called me a cheat, but I wasn't typing in any codes and to me it was no different than reading a few hints and tips back in the day.

After what seemed like forever, I reached the final screen. I'd got the key, deposited the bomb and escaped into the helicopter. I couldn't believe it! This was actually happening. Even the naysayers and trolls were cheering me on. And then something happened that ruined my faith in humanity forever. The agent I was chatting to in the game said, 'That was great, but I need you to go back into the building and do one more thing.'

Wait... what? No. That isn't right, surely? Go back inside? But I've completed the game? No way, mate. Turns out that for the Switch version, they had added one final little bit. No worries. 'I can do this,' I thought. I was the gaming king...

I couldn't. I walked back into the building and died after about 30 seconds. I rage quitted. I still haven't completed a videogame, and probably never will.

Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

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Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

I'll give you games!

Some time ago, I went on a day trip to Calais with my parents and their slightly dull friends Jo and Tony. As it turns out, there isn't much to do in Calais for a ten-year-old – or, at least, there wasn't back in the early Eighties, other than watch his parents buy booze and cigarettes, and have grown-up conversations with their friends about things that make said ten-year-old want to beat himself into unconsciousness with a baguette.

Fortunately, we went for lunch in what I remember as a very stereotypically quaint French cafe, which, I'd noted on the way in, was a couple of doors down from a games arcade. I shovelled my food down as quickly as I could, and begged to be allowed to visit the arcade while the adults finished theirs. I remember it being cramped, incongruous, and dark. They'd packed as many arcade machines into the place as they could. I was never exactly small for my age, but I was smaller than I am now, and weaving my way through the machines felt like being lost in a forest of glowing screens, electronic creatures chirruping and squawking all around.

And there, right at the very back of the arcade, I entered a clearing, and had an encounter that has stayed with me ever since: it was my very first glimpse of *Tron*.

It stood out among the other machines, because it looked completely different. The other cabinets were wood and plastic. This one hummed with power, radiating impossible light. It seemed to have been hewn from neon, glowing ultraviolet in the dankness of the arcade. Appropriately, given the film upon which it was based, it seemed otherworldly, pulsing with fierce, 'play me', energy.

To be honest, I may have romanticised the moment over the ensuing decades, but something about it stuck with me. I don't even remember much about the game itself. I've played it since, and it's not all that. But that cabinet… man… that got me. I think it spoke to the core of why I fell in love with games; this feeling I always had that they were from somewhere else. They aren't from our universe. They're relics of ancient intelligences, like the monolith from *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

On the very rare occasions a mate would force a bunch of pirated games upon me – then, and even more so now, I always wanted to pay for my games (nothing righteous about it; I just liked owning the complete package) – it felt like archeology.

When we heard about the people behind the games, your Matthew Smiths and Sandy Whites, they were as beguiling and as unreachable as somebody born centuries before. I often wonder how it was for them, back then; whether they ever had a sense of being revered like legends. Whether they knew if, for millions of us, their games were treated like magical artefacts.

Have we lost that now? Do games still have that quality for the latest generations of gamer? We're surrounded by technology now, so I fear games have lost their uniqueness. They're no longer a glowing signpost to the impossible adventure, in an analogue world of beige and brown. ✱

> "The other cabinets were wood and plastic. This one hummed with power, radiating impossible light"

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

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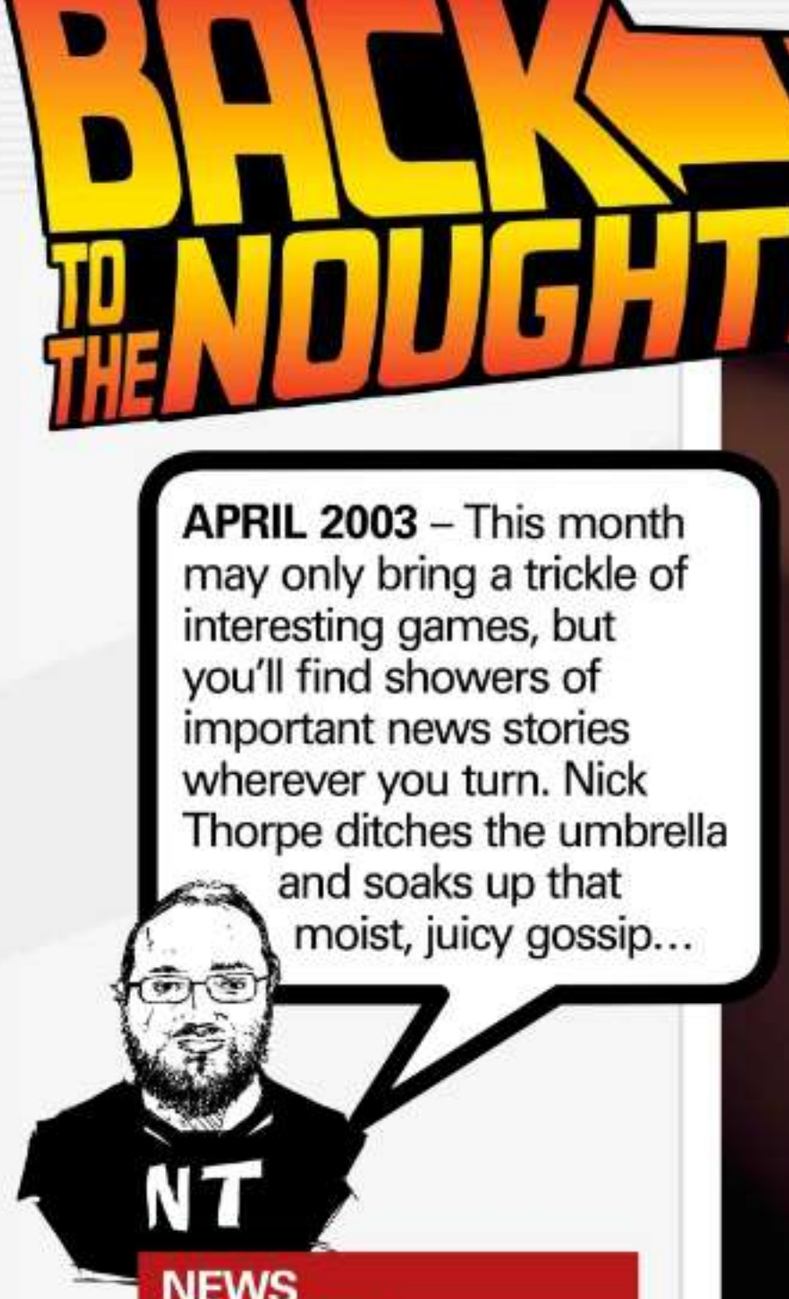
BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

Could Nokia bring the same disruption to the handheld market that Sony and Microsoft did to home consoles?


APRIL 2003 – This month may only bring a trickle of interesting games, but you'll find showers of important news stories wherever you turn. Nick Thorpe ditches the umbrella and soaks up that moist, juicy gossip…
NT

NEWS APRIL 2003

The war in Iraq raged on this month, with the US-led coalition capturing a number of key government figures and taking control of Baghdad, the nation's capital city. In a symbolic moment, a statue of the now-deposed president Saddam Hussein was pulled down on 9 April, with American military forces providing assistance to Iraqi citizens. Hussein himself was nowhere to be found though, having fled Baghdad at some point during the conflict, and he remained at large.

Basketball legend Michael Jordan played his final match on 16 April, scoring 15 points for the Washington Wizards in a losing effort against the Philadelphia 76ers. The six-time NBA champion and two-time Olympic gold medallist had already retired from the sport twice, leaving in 1993 to pursue a baseball career and in 1999 due to an NBA lockout and the departure of key Chicago Bulls teammates. He had returned to the game following 9/11, with the intention of donating his salary to a relief effort.

On 22 April, the AMD Opteron became the first CPU to natively use the 64-bit x86 architecture. Though this CPU was targeted at servers and workstations, the instruction set it introduced has become the standard used in most PCs today.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM APRIL 2003

This month provided the first hands-on reports on gaming's latest format, the N-Gage, which was shown off by Nokia in a swanky preview event held on the London Eye. However, despite the seriousness with which the mobile phone giant approached the venture, the assembled masses were unconvinced that it could topple the Game Boy Advance. A report in *Edge* claimed that it "didn't see anything there to persuade it that the N-Gage will be a serious rival to Nintendo's market-monopolising platform". The system's 3D performance was "workable, if not aesthetically delightful" in *Tomb Raider* and "unplayable" in *Super Monkey Ball*, while a "hostage-style video clip" of Yuji Naka endorsing the hardware "as if at gunpoint" did little to help. With no price point fixed and a feeling that Nokia "doesn't know enough about the games industry", there was adequate cause to question whether the Finnish company could achieve the sales it hoped for.

But if Nintendo's hold over the handheld market was assured, its place in the home console was under major threat, as UK retailers began to ditch the GameCube – though naturally, they made noncommittal noises when asked for comment. The aggressive clearance price cuts made their intentions clear, though. The Dixons group, including the Currys and PC World chains, made the first move – the system was slashed to £99 with one bundled game from a choice of five, while all games were reduced to £24.99 or less. Argos topped the offer soon after, with a £78.99 bundle including a game and a memory card, making a mockery of Nintendo's official £129.99 *Metroid Prime* bundle. The console manufacturer could at least take heart in the fact that this price slashing did at least put GameCubes in homes – *games™* noted that system sales were up 68% after four week-on-week increases.

Edge also reported on the announcement of a formal merger proposal between Sega and Sammy – a move it feared "really could spell the end of the company". With Sammy seen as the financially stronger party and its president Hajime Satomi earmarked as the head of the combined company, it was a valid concern. Shareholder voting was to take place

[GameCube] Desperate defending from Ashley Cole in the best game of the month.

[PS2] Praise for Rayman's latest adventure seemed to be given rather grudgingly by *Play* and *XBM*'s reviewers.

[PC] As tanks rolled into the real Baghdad, *Edge* found *Command & Conquer Generals* to be a bit too close to reality.

in June and the deal was expected to be completed by October, though *Edge* reported that "after the announcement was made, the price of each company's stock nosedived, reflecting considerable internal opposition to the arrangement". The magazine also noted that interest from Microsoft and Electronic Arts was not to be dismissed, and online reports of a potential merger with Namco also emerged this month.

PAL reviews rolled in for *Metroid Prime* this month (97% *NGC*, 9.6/10 *Cube*), but if you were more keen on football than Morph Balls, importing *Winning Eleven 6: Final Evolution* was the way to go. Konami's football sim was hailed as a triumph by *NGC* in a 93% review, which declared that, "There are no cheesy goals, no unwelcome assistance from the computer, and no way to win on the hardest difficulty without having a genuine understanding of the real sport." *Cube* scored the game 9.2/10, calling it, "The best football game ever", and urging readers to buy a Freeloader import disc. Game Boy Advance players could enjoy an accurate conversion of *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo*, which *Cube* scored 9/10 and praised for the potential to develop your skill. *NGC* was less impressed, however, awarding 79% and criticising the uneven learning curve and visibility problems on the original GBA's screen.

This month's other platform exclusives were broadly well received, but didn't exactly set pulses racing. Xbox multiplayer brawler *Kung Fu Chaos* got 7/10 from *Edge*, which commended its attempts to "defy the limitations of the traditionally-dull party game genre" but still detected a "lack of substance". Over on the PS2, survival horror sequel *Galerians: Ash* scored 73% in *Play*, containing "some of the most unsettling scenes we can remember" but failing to impress with its action gameplay. Surprisingly, the magazine felt that *Guilty Gear X2* "doesn't involve a huge amount of skill" and scored it 72%. *Command & Conquer Generals*, the first 3D entry in the classic RTS series, earned 7/10 from *Edge*. The magazine felt that the game's positive features were "overshadowed by the topical overtones", and that it seemed to "revel in the horrors of modern war".

[Xbox] *Kung Fu Chaos* was more *Power Stone* than *Fuzion Frenzy*, for which we should all be thankful.

Ubisoft's platform sequel *Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc* impressed across platforms. *XBM* gave it 8/10 and said it was "fine, if rather derivative", while *Play* gave it 88% and described it as, "Colourful, cute and unoriginal, just like *Rayman* has always been." Shoot-'em-up revival *Defender* (4.0/10 *Cube*, 6/10 *XBM*) and platformer *Dr Muto* (5.0/10 *Cube*, 7/10 *XBM*) both offered little to shout about, but if any game earned a trip straight to the bin this month, it was *Vexx*. According to *Play*, the 3D mascot platformer "looks like an N64 title" and suffered from "generic tasks". Was the magazine's 23% score too harsh? Not according to *Edge*, which gave it 3/10 and felt that it "actually seems to go out of its way to annoy the player".

Join us again next month – a funny N-Gage thing could happen! Maybe. ✱

[Game Boy Advance] If you're wondering what happened here, Sakura has just murdered Ryu in cold blood.

CHARTS

APRIL 2003

PLAYSTATION 2

1 – Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell (Ubisoft)
2 – Primal (Sony)
3 – The Sims (EA)
4 – Grand Theft Auto: Vice City (Take 2)
5 – The Getaway (Sony)

XBOX

1 – The Sims (EA)
2 – Halo: Combat Evolved (Microsoft)
3 – Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance (Konami)
4 – Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon (Ubisoft)
5 – Project Gotham Racing (Microsoft)

GAMECUBE

1 – Metroid Prime (Nintendo)
2 – The Sims (EA)
3 – Super Monkey Ball 2 (Infogrames)
4 – Super Smash Bros Melee (Nintendo)
5 – Super Mario Sunshine (Nintendo)

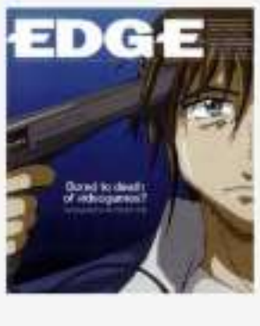
MUSIC

1 – Make Luv (Room 5 ft Oliver Cheatham)
2 – American Life (Madonna)
3 – In Da Club (50 Cent)
4 – Come Undone (Robbie Williams)
5 – Out Of Time (Blur)

THIS MONTH IN...

games™

Reader Michelle Waghorn writes, "Retro gaming may be becoming popular, but where are they going to draw the line on what they bring back? Sonic will always be cool, but ye olde Atari arcade games? [...] Please tell me they're not going to bring back *Horace Goes Skiing* for the GameCube!" We see dear old Horace as more of a TikTok star...

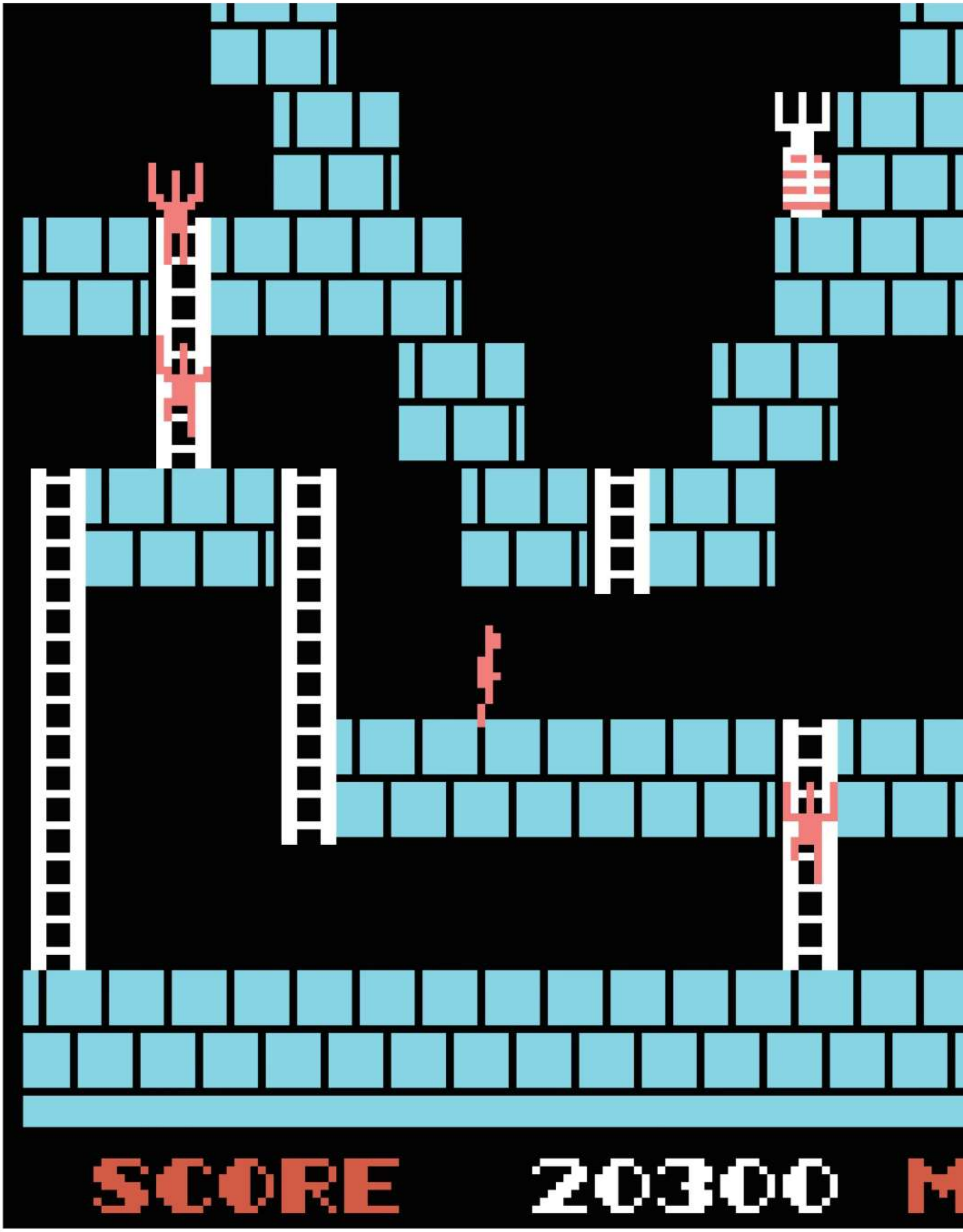


Edge

"Are there any Jennifer Minters, Davina Brabens, Toni Crowthers etc? Of course there aren't," writes Roland Casewell, riled up by *Edge*'s previous issue. "You can't turn your nose up at a pastime, label it 'sad', then bitch about it 20 years later because it's evolved into something you don't like." *Edge*'s reply says it all: "Erm, this is a joke, right?"

XBM

"Could you explain to me what all this outrageous nonsense is about not bringing out *Shenmue III*," asks reader Eleanor Monger, who has heard rumours of the series' cancellation. "You should know that with legendary game designer Yu Suzuki at the helm, *Shenmue III* was *never* going to be canned by Sega," *XBM* reassures her.


SCORE
20300

Lode Runner

WORTH ITS WEIGHT IN GOLD

» SG-1000 » 1984 » SEGA

I've never really been sold on the idea that retro gaming is solely about nostalgia. Don't get me wrong, revisiting past favourites gives me the same warm, fuzzy feelings anyone else would get. Reading the recent *NBA Jam* book by Reyan Ali recently brought *Smash TV* to the forefront of my mind, a space it hadn't occupied in many years, and the game's music became the soundtrack to one of my afternoons in the office this month. But I've been having a pretty good time with the latest *Lode Runner* on PlayStation 4 this month, and that's a game that doesn't have any fond childhood memories attached.

Lode Runner was originally released a few years before I was even born, and I didn't have my first encounter with the game until it was at least 20 years old. Even then, it was more because of the system it was on than anything else. While I was in college, I had become fascinated with the SG-1000 as it was the only Sega console I'd never played, and decided to check out its library. I skipped straight over games like *Flicky*, *Wonder Boy* and *Galaga*, eager to try games that would be new experiences to me. One of those games was *Lode Runner*, and it grabbed me immediately thanks to its fast, challenging platform gameplay. It felt much more technically solid than other games on the system, many of which suffered from some pretty jerky scrolling due to hardware limitations. I wondered if I'd uncovered a hidden gem, but a quick bit of research taught me that the game was in fact an established classic, alongside other SG-1000 games that I'd played, like *Elevator Action*. That didn't matter, though – I'd found a new favourite, and decided it would be part of my SG-1000 collection one day.

Compared to most of the GameCube and PlayStation 2 games I was playing at the time, *Lode Runner*'s potent mix of action and strategy was tough but easy to grasp and refreshingly uncomplicated. No matter whether or not I experienced it as a kid, that's something I'll always be able to appreciate about classic games in general. ✱

retro GAMER PRESENTS

THE 16-B

NINTENDO V

Everyone with even the slightest knowledge of the history of videogames knows about the great console war. By now it's pretty much accepted folklore that Sega, the plucky upstart with its exciting new mascot and lax stance on bitmapped bloodshed, strolled up to the arrogant giant Nintendo and gave it a big old smack in the mouth, loosening the *Mario* maker's monopolistic grip on the console market forever. But that's just the surface story. Few accounts of the period venture beyond North America, despite the fact that gaming in the late Eighties and early Nineties was far from a global business – the major markets around the world each had their own distinct regional character and preferences. By examining how the well-known American story compares to how the combatants fared in Europe, and particularly the UK, we can get a better picture of how some of each company's actions were driven by rigid corporate cultures, and how willing each was to be flexible in reacting to its circumstances.

16-BIT WARS

SEGA

Mario or Sonic? SNES or Mega Drive? Innocuous questions now, but ones that inspired fierce tribal loyalty in gamers in the early Nineties. We speak to the men tasked with winning hearts and minds for their brands, in a conflict that was as much about image and attitude as graphics and gameplay

WORDS BY **NICK THORPE**

Of course, there's a reason that people focus on the North American market – as well as being the largest territory, it's also the most representative of the global average. This story starts with an event just as heavily ingrained in the videogaming mythos as the console war itself – Nintendo's revival of the North American console market, beginning with the 1985 launch of the NES in New York. Nintendo had shrewdly altered the Famicom for the needs of the market, creating a console that didn't look like previous ones, and bundling a toy robot so as to soothe retailers that were still reluctant to stock videogames. It's something that Tom Kalinske remembers well, as he was then at Mattel, which had recently been burned by the Intellivision's collapse during the disastrous 1983 market crash. "All of us who were watching this thought, 'Are you guys crazy? We just collapsed, how can you start getting into this business?' But we were all wrong, and they were right." The system succeeded ▶

WAR VETERANS

TOM KALINSKE

CEO, Sega Of America, 1990-1996

DON COYNER

Marketing manager, Nintendo Of America 1988-1995

NICK ALEXANDER

CEO, Virgin Mastertronic/Sega Europe 1988-1994

MIKE HAYES

Marketing director, Nintendo UK 1989-1994

» Nintendo's early advertising emphasised the family-friendly image it has been associated with for decades now.

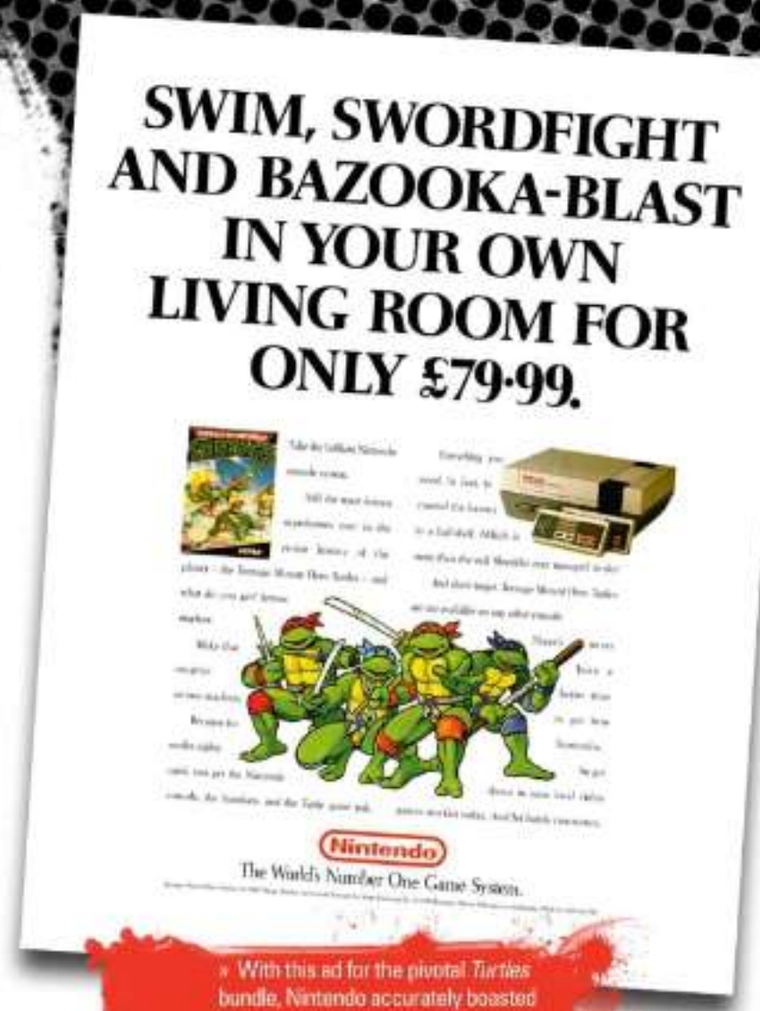
» Sega claimed to be the most popular console brand in Europe, which was true.

» Early Genesis ads in America focused on the system's technological superiority over Nintendo's 8-bit console.

in several more US test markets during 1986, and eventually went fully national that same year. With popular games including *Super Mario Bros*, *The Legend Of Zelda* and *Metroid*, nothing seemed to be able to slow the system down. "We did this commercial where we pulled back from a group of kids chanting 'Mario, Mario' and as you pulled back to the view from space, they're collected in a group that forms Mario's face," says Don Coyner, who joined Nintendo during its late Eighties ascendancy. "That was a fun shoot. Technology has changed so much, that was a new technique – to be able to clone kids. There were only maybe a hundred kids or something, so we had to turn them into thousands." That *Super Mario Bros 3* advert was a fitting visual metaphor for Nintendo's position in the console marketplace, as it dominated both the USA and Japan.

When Nintendo was building its juggernaut, Sega didn't even have a consumer division in North America. Seeing Nintendo's success inspired Sega to localise its own product, and by March 1986 it had decided to adapt its Mark III console for the American market. In the August 1989 issue of *Computer Entertainer*, Sega's product manager Steve Hanawa described having just three months to prepare for a debut at the summer CES in Chicago, and then another three to be ready for launch in September 1986. Scarcely a year later the company signed a distribution deal with Tonka, a major toy company. Though this deal has frequently been criticised due to Tonka's perceived difficulties in understanding the videogames market, it was a necessity – Sega was a tiny outfit struggling to establish a foothold. When *CVG* interviewed Bruce Lowry, the head of Nintendo's UK operation NESI, in April 1988, he claimed, "Last year 3.2 million Nintendo units were sold in the US and Sega sold less than 10% of that."

Fortunately for Sega, it had a much smoother ride in the European market, where consoles were a minority interest here, due to the domination of various 8-bit home computers. Neither console manufacturer had a European office, and it was Mastertronic that spotted the opportunity to become Sega's UK distributor. That, however, required major investment from Richard Branson's Virgin Group. "We at that point weren't thinking about Sega and videogames, we were thinking about budget software," says Nick Alexander, who had founded Virgin Games in 1982. "From Mastertronic's point of view, they wanted to raise some money to pay for their first shipments of Sega products for Christmas 1987, and Sega would only supply to their overseas distributors with a letter of credit." The deal started off disastrously. "Sega delivered all of their Christmas product to European distributors on Boxing Day, which created a huge problem because they'd paid for all of this stuff, and then the retailers had cancelled their orders and they couldn't sell any," says Nick. "I went to CES in January 1988, and Nintendo had had their first very good Christmas in the US, and at that point I realised that the videogames part of the business might be quite interesting to us after all," he adds with a laugh. "Mastertronic was actually really struggling for cash, having had all this money sucked out of it by Sega. Sega, understanding that we might acquire the rest of Mastertronic, said that if we were to do so they would also give us their distribution in France and in Germany, where they had other reluctant or unable distributors." The deal was done, and Nick became CEO of Virgin Mastertronic.



» With this ad for the pivotal *Turtles* bundle, Nintendo accurately boasted about its global supremacy.

The team at Virgin Mastertronic felt that Sega's Japanese approach wasn't appropriate for the UK, and created its own branding. "They were a very good company at writing games – they weren't particularly a marketing company. So their marketing strategy had followed Nintendo's, being kids playing with mum and dad and aren't we all happy families," Nick recalls. "As Virgin, when we started marketing the product, we went, 'Actually, that's not what people want.' Teenagers want to be rebellious, this needs to be edgy. That's just a much better message for anyone who's over about ten years old, so that's how we went ahead and it worked very well." Virgin's Sega branding was colourful and engaging, built around the, 'Do me a favour, plug me into a Sega,' catchphrase, and following that rocky start the company managed

It's not even close. The massive Sega" Genesis" library is an insane line-up of more than 150 titles. Compared to . . . well, you get the picture. But we're not just talking numbers here. Genesis is going off with unreal new games like Sonic the Hedgehog," Spider-Man® Toejam and Earl," Golden Axe II" and Joe Montana II Sports Talk Football." Any one of these would be enough to blister your thumbs for weeks. So for the best selection of arcade games, action/adventure, role playing, sports, you name it, check out the Genesis library. Nothing else stacks up.
SEGA GENESIS
It's a whole lot more.
The other guys just don't stack up.
« Once the SNES arrived, Sega continued to exploit its early market arrival, this time highlighting its larger software library.

to create a European Sega customer base. It wasn't particularly large, but it was active and the Master System was respectably represented in the magazines that would cover it.

Nintendo's start in Europe was considerably less successful. According to Mike Hayes, who was initially tasked with relaunching the NES, the choice of a non-gaming company as distributor was to blame. "We picked up Nintendo in 1989 when we were at San Serif – we'd made a lot of money with *Trivial Pursuit* and *Pictionary*. It was being looked after by NESI, which was being run by Ron Judy, and Nintendo in the UK and Ireland had been a flop, because it had been distributed through Mattel and it was treated very much as a toy," says Mike. "At that point, Nintendo was virtually a nonentity and the Master System and Atari were dominating. In fact, anecdotally, the main customer for Nintendo at that time was Boots, the chemist. When we picked it up, we were selling through something like 8,000 units a month." While the commonly told history is that the Master System was more popular than the NES in this region, this wasn't true for the entire generation. "The market shares were heavily in Sega's favour, so one of the things we did was we worked with Konami, and we bundled the 8-bit with the *Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles* product and called it the 'Mutant Machine'," says Mike. "It was that, really. That turned the fortunes around because sales went up to 200,000 from 8,000 and we managed to significantly claw market share back from the Master System. ▶

BUT WHAT ABOUT JAPAN?

WHY THE CONSOLE WAR NEVER GOT STARTED IN THE HOMELAND OF SEGA AND NINTENDO

On paper, Nintendo and Sega should have been a classic Japanese rivalry. Much could be made of a battle between Nintendo, the established traditionalist company based in the ancient capital Kyoto, and Sega, the Tokyo-based upstart founded by American serviceman. But the truth is that there was never much in the way of real competition between Sega and Nintendo in the Japanese market – at least, not during the cartridge era.

Both companies launched their first cartridge-based home consoles in July of 1983, and by the end of 1984 Nintendo's Famicom had decisively bested Sega's technologically inferior SG-1000. The revised Mark III, which was the basis of the western Master System, didn't help Sega to gain significant ground when it launched in 1985. NEC's PC Engine launched in 1987 and pushed Sega into third place, a situation that wasn't changed by the launch of the Mega Drive in 1988. By the time the Super Famicom arrived in 1990, the concept of Sega as legitimate threat to Nintendo's domination of the Japanese market would have been present in only the most deluded of fanboy minds.

This wasn't helped by the fact that *Sonic* was far less successful in Japan than elsewhere, despite Sega's best efforts. While *Sonic* was supported with all sorts of arcade spin-offs, licensed toys, a manga series and even a promotional campaign with the enormously popular pop group Dreams Come True, the Japanese public never embraced him in the same way western audiences did. To illustrate the point, in April 1993, *Sega Force*'s Japanese reporter Norton Kai explained that a £6.5 million advertising campaign for *Sonic 2* had delivered an official figure of 400,000 sales – far below Sega's target of a million.

It would take another generation for the two companies to reach parity in Japan. Sega experienced its greatest Japanese success with the Saturn, fuelled by the *Virtua Fighter* craze, while the loss of key developers and a lack of RPGs proved ruinous to the N64's chances in Japan. Of course, by that point both of them were fighting over second place, with both consoles way behind Sony's PlayStation.

ART ATTACK

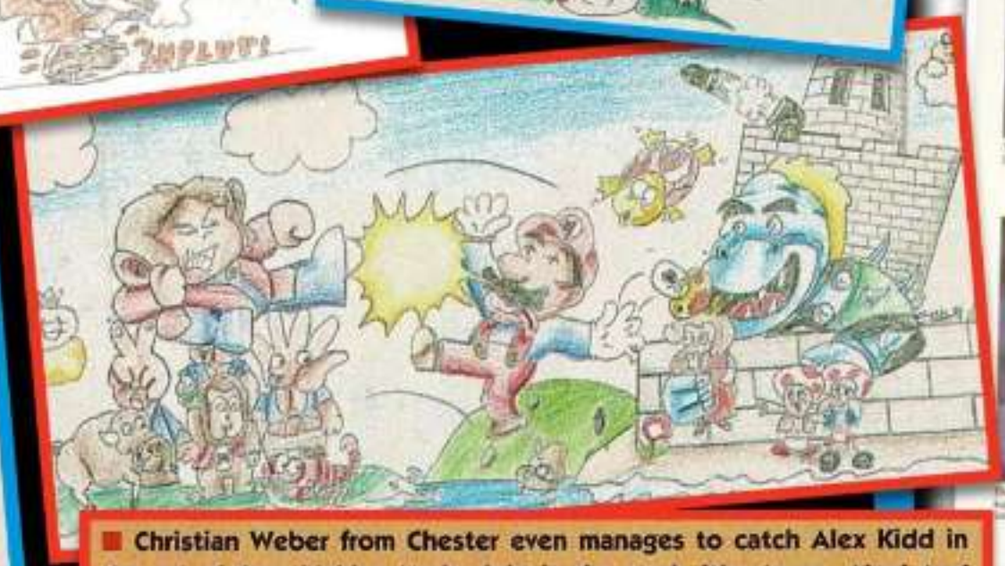
Though the console war's attack ads were most prominent on the other side of the Atlantic, the battle was brought to life in vivid detail on the letters pages of the UK's games magazines. Even as early as 1991, well before the SNES officially arrived on these shores, you could find art of Sega and Nintendo heroes hitting, shooting and generally maiming one another – with the focus naturally being on figureheads Sonic and Mario. Here are some of the contributions received by Sega Power *and* Total! *back in the early Nineties...*

Way to go Mario! And thanks to Liam Donaghy of County Derry for this amusing little stripette.

I NEED TO LOSE SOME WEIGHT
YOU'RE RIGHT ABOUT THAT YOU FAT SWINE!
Skwab!
HI YA!
WE'LL NEED TO GET RID OF THIS FLAB
HA HA, WHO NEEDS DIET

16 year old Rob Parry from Southport has been at it again. Here's his latest rib-tickler. Keep 'em coming, Rob

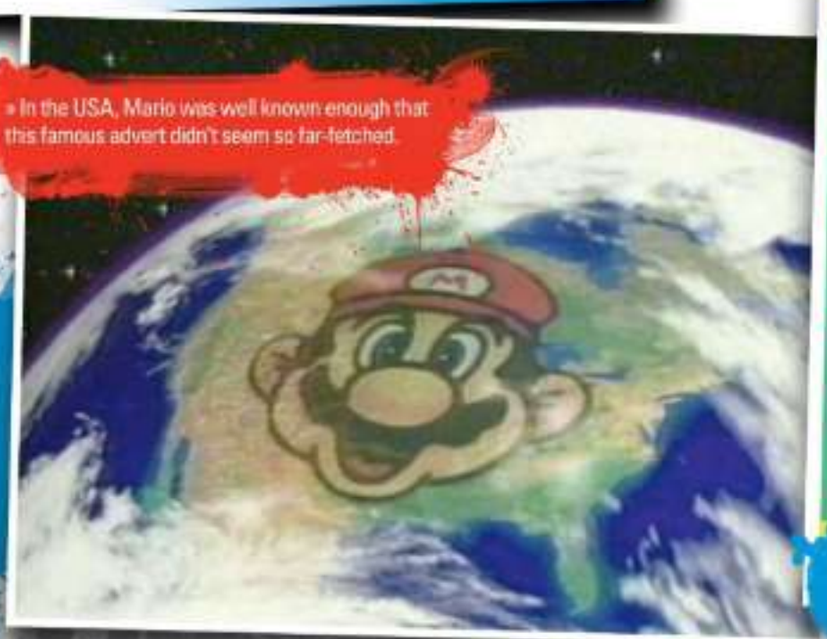
Er, Robbie Dickinson (from somewhere), you're a very sick man. Keep it up! Ooh, it hurts just to look at it...



Christian Weber from Chester even manages to catch Alex Kidd in the act of drop-kicking Mario right in the mush. Way to go, Alex! And look at all the detail in the background – our Art Ed better watch out!

» Nintendo's print ads rarely focused heavily on Mario, and tended to be less colourful and engaging.

SUPER STARTERS FROM NINTENDO
CONTROL DECK
SUPER MARIO 3
The new NES Sets from Nintendo are the ace way into the hottest gameplaying action around.
You've got the Challenge Set, complete with the award winning Super Mario Bros. 3. Or you can go for the double fun of the Promotion Set, with the original Mario Bros. and smash hit Solar Jetman.
And don't forget, there are loads of other NES titles to try, with more coming out all the time.
£79.99
The Challenge Set with Super Mario Bros. 3, £79.99
CONTROL DECK
SOLAR JETMAN
MARIO BROS.
The Promotion Set with Super Mario Bros. and Solar Jetman, £79.99
FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL THE NINTENDO HOTLINE ☎ 0703 652222



» In the USA, Mario was well known enough that this famous advert didn't seem so far-fetched.

» Sega countered Turtle Power by heavily promoting its own mascot Sonic The Hedgehog, which paid dividends.

AGED BEEF

When you look at the state of the PlayStation 4 vs Xbox One discourse today, it's easy to wonder if we were always like this. Thanks to the magic of ancient Usenet discussions, we can tell you that console wars never change. Can you tell the vintage videogame venom from today's troublesome tweets?

[1] *"Just face it: the _____ beats out [competing console] in the RPG department and that's why [competitor] forced me to buy a _____."*
PS4 or SNES?

[2] *This has nothing to do with why _____ sucks. They've been in the game for years and haven't provided one single solitary positive mark on the industry besides [Sonic/Halo].*
Sega or Microsoft?

[3] *Here's a compromise. Give _____ the censored version since they're all about that censorship anyway and give [competitor] the uncensored version. Everybody wins.*
Sony or Nintendo?

[4] *I chose a _____ over a [competitor] simply because it had titles available that I absolutely wanted to play. I couldn't care less if the [competitor] has a technical edge over the _____, the _____ still looks and sounds pretty good.*
Mega Drive or Xbox One?

[5] *I totally disagree with the _____ crap. [Manufacturer] sucks and no game made for both [competing console] and _____ is better on _____.*
Genesis or Xbox One?

Around 1990-91, we were well into the 60% market share piece. But I think the true battle began when they launched the Mega Drive."

Indeed, this was the hardest fought battle – and in the beginning, Sega couldn't even be assured of a distant second place when it started in North America in late 1989. The electronics giant NEC was launching the TurboGrafx-16, a rebranded and redesigned PC Engine, within weeks of Sega releasing the Mega Drive, now renamed to the Genesis. But NEC's $10 million marketing push failed quickly and spectacularly, to the point that NEC abandoned its planned European launch. Sega quickly aimed its American marketing message towards trying to capture market share from Nintendo, and it launched the famous 'Genesis Does What Nintendon't' campaign that highlighted the system's graphical capabilities compared to those of the NES, as well as drawing attention to its arcade conversions and celebrity endorsed sports games. Taking on Nintendo in such a direct way was a bold move for an underdog competitor, but despite an improvement of sales compared to the Master System, progress was slow over the first year. "Sega Of America was a disappointment to Sega Of Japan, to Hayao Nakayama," says Tom Kalinske. "He thought they should have been able to sell a million Genesis units, and they had not come close to that number." Tom was hired as the new CEO in late 1990. At the same time, the Mega Drive was just launching into Europe, where Sega was looking to consolidate its progress and take a more direct role. "We added Spain in 1990 because we'd done a jolly good job, and then in 1991 we sold ourselves effectively to Sega," says Nick. "We split what was Virgin Games into two bits – Virgin retained the publishing bit, which became Virgin Interactive Entertainment, and I went off to run the marketing, sales and distribution bit, which became Sega Europe in summer 1991."

Tom had previously encountered Nintendo prior to joining Sega, as CEO of Matchbox Toys. "At the time, we wanted to do a Matchbox Nintendo game," he recalls. "So I had to deal with Howard Lincoln and the Nintendo guys way back then." One of Nintendo's main innovations concerned the way it dealt with third-party developers. NES developers were required to sign a licensing agreement on Nintendo's very restrictive terms, including content approval processes, with a lockout chip in place to thwart those who refused. "I saw how you had to meet certain quality standards, they reviewed the gameplay. They were tough, they were really hard to please. So I had that opinion of Nintendo – first of all, congrats on rebuilding the videogames business, but gee, do you treat your third parties terribly!" This practice had ensured the NES wasn't killed by a glut of poor software, but it was a huge burden for third-party publishers. Companies had to buy all their cartridges from Nintendo, pay for them in full up-front and couldn't return them. Nintendo limited publishers to five game releases per year, and those games had to remain exclusive for two years – meaning that NES developers typically didn't work on the Master System.

With the NES selling so well, many companies accepted these terms in order to get on the gravy train. Others were dissatisfied with the situation, most notably Electronic Arts, which saw the new generation as an opportunity to back a rival platform. By proving that it had reverse-engineered the Mega Drive and could release unlicensed games if it chose to, it was able to negotiate concessions from Sega that would have been unthinkable from Nintendo. The key one, later granted to other companies including Konami, Acclaim and Accolade, was the ability to manufacture its own cartridges, allowing EA to manage its own costs and order quantities. In return, EA provided strong support with plenty of popular sports games as well as flight simulators and more. Sega also set up American development studios to provide games suited to local tastes. Sega's 16-bit software supply would be much healthier than what it could provide for the Master System.

In the summer of 1991 the American launch of the SNES was imminent, and Sega had cause to be concerned as it would lose its technological superiority. Nintendo's machine could display more colours, and *F-Zero* showed off playfield scaling and rotation that Sega's machine couldn't do. Then there was *Super Mario World*, the best game in an already beloved series. But at the perfect time, Sega's trump card arrived – *Sonic The Hedgehog*. While it didn't have the longevity of *Super Mario World*, the flagship SNES platformer, it was incredible to behold thanks to its detailed graphics and amazing speed. Sega wasted no time in drawing comparisons between the two games, and embarked on a tour of American shopping malls, allowing players to try both games and make their own minds up, while TV ads featured a salesman desperately trying to flog the SNES to a gamer who was interested in the faster game on the cheaper console. You might reasonably assume this was risky, but that's not how Tom sees it. "We had done research at Sega Of America, and in our research we knew that teens preferred *Sonic* over *Mario* when they had a chance to play them side by side, so we knew the mall tour would work," he explains. "We knew that the competitive advertising would work, because it would at ▶

» [Mega Drive] *Altered Beast* was a reasonable pack-in, but didn't shift hardware in the numbers Japan wanted.

[6] *If ____ fans were on the Titanic, I wonder how many of them would be insisting that there was nothing wrong with the boat?* ***Sony or Nintendo?***

[7] *When I think of a ____ player I think of someone headstrong, cool, not afraid to go against social and cultural norms, someone who likes sports and probably has no probs hooking up.* ***Genesis or Xbox One?***

[8] *____ has absolutely won a lot, problem is idiots who think units sold is the only factor. Did [competitor] sell more? Yes, but [manufacturer] made more ____.* ***Genesis or Xbox One?***

[9] *Overrated? I dunno if I'd ever use that word to describe a [competitor]! I don't think they're popular enough to be overrated. Probably the most hated system out there to be honest. They're not bad if you don't care about exclusives, I played mine a lot! But ____ does have better games.* ***PS4 or SNES?***

[10] *I don't want to offend anyone, but I'm beginning to think that ____ players are mostly prepubescent boys with too much time on their hands.* ***PlayStation or Nintendo?***

(ANSWERS) *1: SNES, 2: Microsoft, 3: Sony, 4: Mega Drive, 5: Genesis, 6: Nintendo, 7: Xbox One, 8: Xbox One, 9: PS4, 10: Nintendo*

« Sega ran anti-SNES adverts in British magazines, including Nintendo titles like *Total!* as well as multiformat publications.

least jolt the Nintendo user to give us a try. We spent millions – I don't want to underestimate the amount we spent, I don't remember the exact number – but it worked. Sonic became more popular than Mickey Mouse back in those days, certainly more popular for a while than Mario. It was really a well-researched and well-thought-out campaign, and that was led largely by Al Nilsen." The game drove Mega Drive sales as a pack-in title, despite the Japanese office's concerns about giving away the system's best game, and the success of that campaign fed into the creation of further confrontational advertising.

Nintendo's decision was that for the US market, the best response was no response. "Sega was doing a really good job of repositioning Nintendo as the kid's machine, your little brother's machine, and they were having some success at that," says Don. "Nintendo was pretty focused, Mr [Minoru] Arakawa who ran the company was pretty intent on, 'Don't react to what these guys are doing, just stay completely focused on what we're doing.' But Sega was very effective, and Sonic The Hedgehog as a character was very effective – the way they positioned him as cool, hip, a little bit irreverent, was kind of repositioning us." One subsequent TV spot showed teenagers talking about how the Genesis was cheaper and had more games than the SNES, with one describing anyone not playing Sega's console as a "giant loser", while another showed a TV playing *Sonic 2* attached to a dragster, compared to an old banger with *Super Mario Kart* hooked up. "They were very aggressive coming at us head to head. I would say for the most part, we didn't respond to any of it in particular," says Don.

In the UK, where Nintendo was behind, it was a slightly different story. Though TV advertising laws prohibited direct attack ads of the kind seen in the USA, Nintendo did briefly take direct shots at Sega in print campaigns – most notably buying the centre pages of the first issue of *Mean Machines Sega* to advertise *Street Fighter II*, then a highly coveted exclusive. But while the marketing team wanted to make changes to Nintendo's presentation, it was largely denied the opportunity to do so. "There was a big difference between the way Nintendo and Sega were run. [At] Nintendo, we reported in to Mr [Minoru] Arakawa in Seattle, and Mr [Hiroshi] Yamauchi used to approve our TV scripts – the control was phenomenal," says Mike. "The Sega style in the UK was quite anarchic and quite out there, and suited the British audience, whereas Nintendo was 'boing' and 'bouncy' so we always felt we were being outgunned – not outclassed, but outgunned – by the crazy Sega guys, and we were definitely hampered and hamstrung by the pretty dull rules that Nintendo would lay down. We couldn't do what we wanted to do. In fact, a multimillion pound TV campaign that I'd worked on very hard was cancelled, which is why we switched to the Rik Mayall ads at the last minute, because they wouldn't approve it."

One peculiarity of Nintendo's approach in both regions was its tendency to preach to the converted. "The one thing that Nintendo was good at, and still is very good at, was harnessing its core fanbase. We had Club Nintendo, and we had a huge operation just dealing with customers and sending out monthly magazines," says Mike. "Interestingly of course, that also played to Nintendo's disadvantage, because it wouldn't engage with the media as much as Sega would do. In fact, we launched the *Official Nintendo Magazine* – I can't remember, but it was only in

» Initially, Nintendo didn't respond in the US, preferring instead to evolve its existing brand messaging

1992 or 1993. Club Nintendo was great for your fanbase, but didn't reach out to the wider gaming audience – but once we did connect, it was a very good relationship that we had." Don remembers things being similar in America. "We did a bit of print, although Nintendo was not a big advertiser in all the gaming magazines – we had *Nintendo Power* and kind of focused on that, and didn't want to give other game magazines a bunch of money."

Meanwhile, the greater autonomy afforded to Sega's international branches allowed them to really push the brand into new areas, particularly when it came to older audiences. "We did a lot of things people weren't aware of," says Tom. "On every United States college campus, we had a 'Sega person' who we gave hardware to, and sent them software regularly, and asked them to wander around the male dormitories and plug it in to play with whoever was there to watch and get involved with it. We were one of the first companies to sponsor MTV in the United States, and obviously that was for teen and older audiences as well."

In the UK, Sega's anarchic Pirate TV advertising campaign turned heads, particularly as the company booked out entire commercial breaks for them, and advertising with *Viz* brought about some risqué campaigns that have since achieved infamy. Sega Europe also pushed into mainstream sports, with its branding prominently visible at Premier League football stadiums and Formula 1 races. "We sponsored the European Grand Prix, which became the Sega Europe Grand Prix, and I got to give Ayrton Senna his prize on the podium," says Nick. "That certainly is a personal highlight – I would rather have been giving it to Damon Hill, but it was quite something to be up there!"

But although Nick agrees that Sega had more autonomy, it was hardly an easy ride. "We had fairly major rows with Sega Japan, and they weren't at all convinced by what we were doing," he remembers. Though he and his staff were now employed by Sega, the culture was still that inherited from the Virgin days. "When we were just the distributor it was up to us what we did. But when we became a wholly owned subsidiary, they started wanting to try to influence us more, but actually we fought hard to keep our independence and they respected the results that we were achieving."

Tom had a very similar experience. "Nick and I used to joke about this," he says, remembering his own battles with head office. "We both were very aggressive in our marketing against Nintendo, and of course Sega Japan was not, and Sega Japan did not agree with that strategy. We were very aggressive in our advertising messages, our promotions, our pricing – we cut our prices several times – and Sega Japan would always say back to us, 'Why don't you do things the way we're doing them here in Japan?' ▶

HEAD TO HEAD

How did the Mega Drive and SNES fare against each other in representing some of the biggest multiplatform games and licensed properties of their generation?

SNES

STREET FIGHTER II

■ Owners of both consoles could be satisfied that they had great conversions of the hottest arcade game of the era, as Capcom did a fantastic job with both. Nintendo's version just clinches it, thanks to better colour and clearer voices, as well as a standard pad that actually has six buttons.

NBA JAM

■ No matter which version of this classic arcade sports game you play, you'll enjoy excellent visuals and fast, responsive gameplay. However, the Mega Drive version dunks on the SNES iteration as the latter only features menu music, with no in-game tunes – a truly baffling exclusion, really.

MORTAL KOMBAT

■ The SNES should walk this, thanks to superior graphics and the Mega Drive version's lack of six-button support. But the gore and fatalities are very much the point of *Mortal Kombat*, and Nintendo's censorship policies really ripped the spine out of this brutal brawler.

FIFA INTERNATIONAL SOCCER

■ EA's sports games were generally much better regarded on the Mega Drive than on the SNES, and the debut of this enduring franchise is no exception. While the two games are presented well, the Mega Drive version feels more responsive and enjoyable.

T2: THE ARCADE GAME

■ Both versions are amongst the very few reasons to bother with their respective systems' lightguns, but the SNES has a clear edge when it comes to representing the original. The Mega Drive version's soundtrack is good, but the SNES game is way more attractive and authentic.

MEGA DRIVE

» [SNES] Sega could no longer boast a power advantage when faced with Mode 7 games like *F-Zero*.

▶ Why don't you use our TV commercials and dub English over them?'" It was a suggestion that failed to convince either man, as Nick recalls. "I hope I was polite, but I tried to put across that perhaps they might do better if they used the European ads in Japan, as they only had a 14% market share there!"

While everyone had their frustrations with their Japanese head offices, they enjoyed causing mild trouble for each other. "There were comparisons, but the rivalry was always friendly. We launched the Rik Mayall TV commercials, we did this in The Ark in Hammersmith, and Sega brought along spotlight vans and shone Sega logos on the side of it – it was that kind of stuff," says Mike, who also remembers how both parties were keen to flaunt their successes. "When we were at the marketing awards, this was in 1992 and Nick had his people there – they won a top award for either the Mega Drive or the advertising. Nick come over to me, because we had a table, cocky as you like and said, 'Oh don't worry, you'll win one of these one day,' and I said, 'We did, last year with the Game Boy!'" Similar shenanigans went on in America. "At CES, we heard that Nintendo was dropping the price of their hardware, and it appeared it was going to be announced the next morning," says Tom. "Our team stayed up all night and went to a Kinko's or some kind of printing shop and had new price lists printed, new PR messages printed, and we even did fake newspapers with the headline 'Sega Genesis drops price to…' whatever it was. We put them under doors, in the hotel, of all the buyers at CES. Everybody got up the next morning and thought that we had cut price first, and then Nintendo had to follow us."

» Since it was fighting from a disadvantage, Nintendo went on the offensive slightly more often in the UK.

But sometimes, Sega's willingness to push the boundaries caused it trouble. While the Mega-CD gave developers an early taste of the next generation's dominant storage format, the hardware's high price and weak games damaged consumer trust. The company was also more tolerant of violent imagery than its rival. "Allowing the real blood in *Mortal Kombat*, that clearly sent a message that we were for older teens and college students," says Tom. "That was really a stab at them where the audience suddenly realised, 'Geez, Nintendo really is for little kids.'" But that wasn't how the press or politicians saw it – to them, *all* videogames were primarily for younger kids.

TOY STORY

■ Both versions of this Pixar tie-in offer a good time, with detailed prerendered 3D graphics and a good variety of things to do. However, for some reason the SNES version omits the technically impressive racing level Day-Toy-Na, making the Mega Drive version the one to play.

ALADDIN

■ Some swear by the amazing animation and sword-swinging combat of Virgin's Mega Drive game, while others think that Capcom's SNES version offers superior control and level design – particularly during the magic carpet ride. We narrowly prefer the Mega Drive version.

ALIEN 3

■ While the film was considered a duffer when it debuted, these platform shooters are both pretty good. The two versions are completely different. The SNES game is a bit slower but more fun, as it doesn't suffer from the camera positioning problems that mar the Mega Drive game.

JURASSIC PARK

■ These were two different games entirely, and while the Mega Drive version lets you be a dinosaur, BlueSky Software's interpretation is a relatively unambitious 2D platformer. Ocean's SNES game mixes top-down sequences with first-person dinosaur encounters, and is more exciting for it.

ADVENTURES OF BATMAN & ROBIN

■ Both of these games look amazing – Konami's SNES version looks like a cartoon come to life, whereas the Mega Drive version uses every clever coding trick in the book. Neither version is a pushover, but the SNES version isn't quite as difficult as its rival.

» [Mega Drive] *Sonic 2*'s internationally coordinated launch was a news event, and Nick's "moment of greatest triumph".

» Steven O'Donnell frequently fronted Sega's UK TV campaigns in the early Nineties, with Rik Mayall becoming his Nintendo counterpart.

» [Mega Drive] Electronic Arts' Mega Drive output was wildly successful, and showed other third parties that choosing Sega was safe.

In America, Sega took the brunt of the criticism in 1993's congressional hearings on videogame violence, with its version of *Mortal Kombat* as well as the notorious Mega-CD game *Night Trap* singled out for scrutiny. They also drew the attention of the UK press, despite *Night Trap*'s legally enforceable BBFC 15 rating, and this led to a memorable moment for Nick. "We were actually interviewing PR agencies the day that the [*Daily*] *Mail* ran their 'Sega Sickener' story, and one of the agencies came in and threw the *Daily Mail* on the table and went, 'This is disgusting, how can we possibly work with people like you who do this sort of thing?' And I said to them, 'Have you actually seen the game?'" They hadn't, so Nick decided to show it to them. "The managing director, you could see him go, 'Oh for goodness' sake, what have I done?' when we showed them it all politely, and off they went."

As the generation continued, the two sides eliminated each other's advantages. Though legal pressure had forced Nintendo to drop its mandatory no-compete clause for licensees, it still had leverage. "I know they don't admit this, but they would say to third parties, 'If you publish on Sega Genesis, you're going to have a problem – we're not going to approve games, and we're not going to give you the quantities you want of your cartridges,'" says Tom. "We had to have a lot of hardware in the market before those companies would feel brave enough to go against Nintendo." Sega reached that point, eventually attracting support from major third-party publishers including Konami in 1992, plus Capcom and Ocean in 1993. And while Nintendo's relative conservatism had allowed it to avoid embarrassing incidents, there was an eventual recognition that it needed to counteract some of Sega's moves, starting with the 'Play It Loud' campaign in 1994. "We'd go out and do picture sorts with gamers – 'If Sega was an animal, what would it be?' And it was sort of a leopard or a cheetah, it was something very fast, and Nintendo was things like an elephant – it's big, it's lumbering, it moves slowly, but it's not a leopard," says Don. "We decided to do a campaign that seemed un-Nintendo-like, to try to show a bit of attitude – 'Okay, we're not just about *Kirby's Adventure*, this pink thing that floats around, there's more attitude there,'" he explains. A Nintendo TV ▶

HANDHELD HOSTILITIES

THE CONSOLE WAR WASN'T JUST FOUGHT IN THE HOME – PLAYERS COULD LITERALLY TAKE IT INTO THE PLAYGROUND

The battle between Nintendo and Sega didn't just coincide with the introduction of 16-bit consoles, but also handheld systems. Nintendo launched the Game Boy in 1989, featuring an economical design with a four-shade greyscale screen that made it look considerably less impressive than its initial rival, Atari's full colour Lynx. However, that design made the Game Boy cheaper to buy and thanks to its superior battery life, cheaper to run. Sega jumped into the market in 1990, repurposing its 8-bit Master System console for the job. The Game Gear faced many of the same problems as the Lynx, such as a high price and poor battery life, but its technology wasn't as impressive. However, Sega could at least guarantee a steady supply of software.

"I actually loved the Game Gear, despite our problem of eating up batteries," says Tom. "I loved the product – the colour screen, I thought it was really high quality, and I liked competing against the Game Boy. Actually, in the US there were some periods of time where we – and we were more expensive, obviously – outsold the Game Boy." However, Nintendo was confident. "When the Game Gear came out it was colour, it had a bigger screen. The Game Boy – you needed to shine a light on it if you wanted to play it in the dark," says Don, who recalls management's recognition that it had a market-appropriate offering. "It was like, 'Don't worry about it, we're $89, we have significant battery life and their games aren't as good.'" Of course, the belligerence was still there, and both Don and Tom remember the campaign in which Sega explained how a dog wouldn't care about having a monochrome handheld instead of a colour one, but would also enjoy drinking from a toilet.

As well as having hardware advantages, Nintendo had the *Tetris* phenomenon on its side. Though widely available on other platforms, it is best remembered as the Game Boy's bundled game. Though the Game Gear had some bespoke *Sonic* games, it couldn't match the universal appeal of the addictive puzzler. The exact number of Game Gears sold prior to its 1997 discontinuation is hard to nail down – *Famitsu* claimed about 10.6 million in mid-1996, while Sega's Hideki Sato claimed about 14 million in a 1998 interview. Neither figure is especially flattering next to the 54.76 million Game Boy consoles sold up to March 1997, though.

» Nintendo rarely acknowledged its competition in most places, so this advert that references Sonic has a very distinctive UK flavour.

» Sega saved its most savage attacks for the handheld battleground, where it had a rougher ride against Nintendo's dominance.

« [SNES] In late 1994, *Donkey Kong Country* on the standard SNES made Sega's decision to launch the 32X look foolish.

» Sega's marketing was often bold – in the case of these Pirate TV ads, booking out entire prime time commercial breaks.

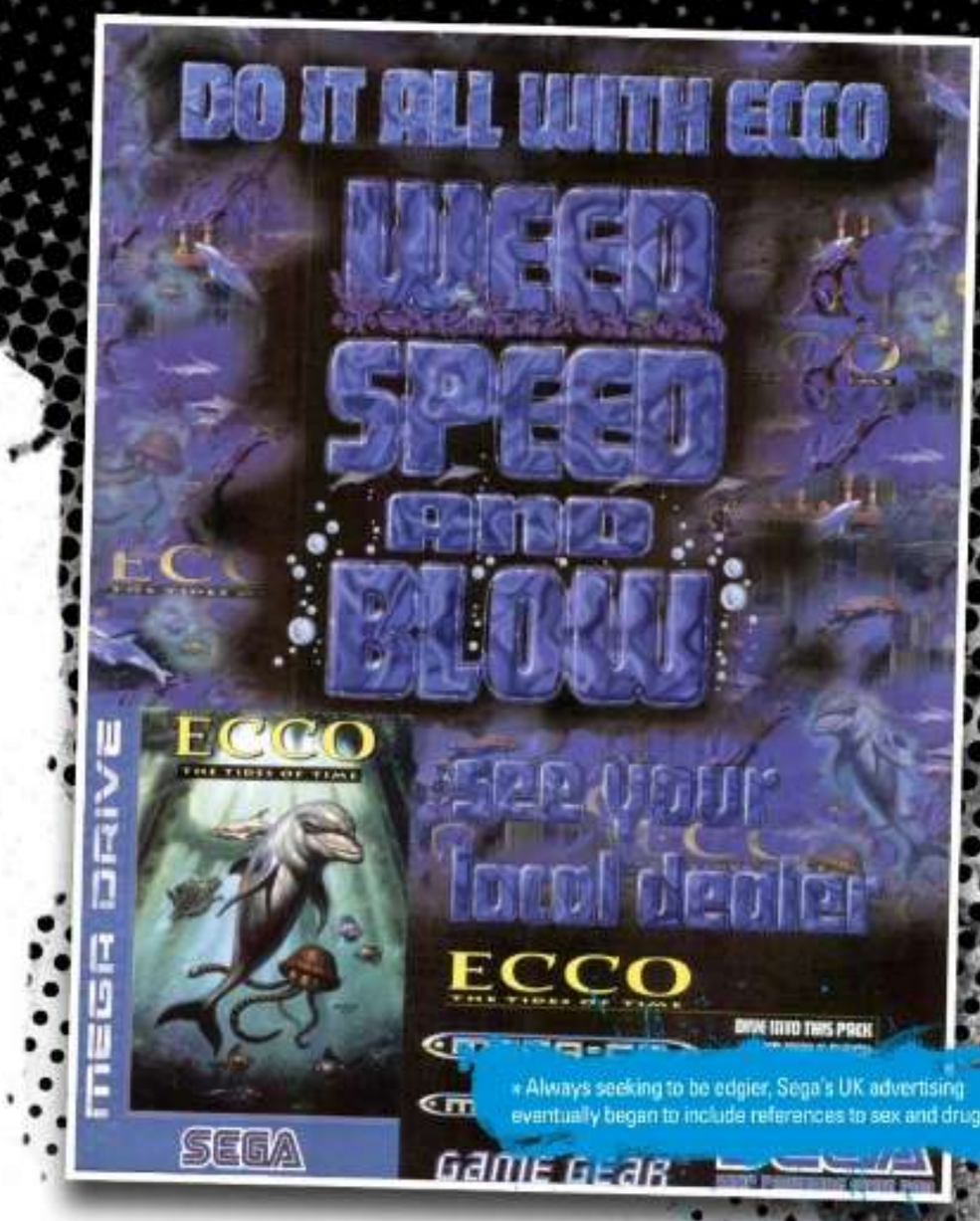
« In an attempt to regain some of its cool factor, Nintendo launched the 'Play It Loud' campaign in 1994.

▶ spot featuring the Butthole Surfers would have been unthinkable just a couple of years prior, as would an uncensored *Mortal Kombat II* – but the introduction of ratings systems also gave Nintendo the excuse it needed to relax some of its policies, and the key arcade conversion fared much better against the Sega version.

Neither side was able to claim a decisive victory in the 16-bit battle but Sega seemed to be narrowly ahead in these regions. Sega claimed 55% of US 16-bit hardware sales in 1994, and the picture was similar in the UK. "We could never get above the 40% to 45% share with the 16-bit," confirms Mike. "The Super Nintendo was a better machine, there's no doubt about it, but how many times have we seen better technology not perform as well as more appropriate technology?" Yet it was Sega that would ultimately blink first. Having been convinced of the value of arriving to market early, it introduced the 32X upgrade in late 1994 – another disastrous add-on that damaged Sega's brand image, as it was soon dropped following the mid-1995 surprise launch of the Saturn, the true Mega Drive successor. Nintendo delivered Rare's *Donkey Kong Country* that Christmas, and the platformer's prerendered 3D graphics proved that there was life left in 16-bit. The game sold 9 million copies, and Nintendo stuck with the SNES as its primary platform through to 1996 – admittedly, partially due to its delayed Nintendo 64 launch.

Some cynics would have you believe that for all of the sound and fury, the console war was largely inconsequential as the next generation saw both competitors squashed by Sony. You could certainly argue that neither party saw a benefit. Though Nintendo sold more SNES consoles than Sega did Mega Drives on a global basis, it marked the start of a long-term decline in Nintendo's home console business, as the SNES sold over 12 million fewer units than the NES had and the N64 and GameCube would do even worse. Nintendo eventually had to abandon its attempts to stay on the technological cutting edge in order to stop the rot. As for Sega, breaking Nintendo's virtual monopoly in the console market was of little benefit. By the time the company published its final Mega Drive game in the autumn of 1997, the Saturn was already moribund and the Dreamcast was being developed. Less than four years later, that console would be discontinued too, marking Sega's withdrawal from the console hardware market.

However, it would be foolish to ignore the impact that the console war had. The conflict drove interest in gaming as a whole – Sega's sales increased by 350% from 1989 to 1993, and despite losing market share in home consoles, Nintendo's sales increased by 118% over the same time period. This growth saw the UK's console market surpass home computer market revenues in 1992,



» Always seeking to be edgier, Sega's UK advertising eventually began to include references to sex and drugs.

and while few of the new competitors that were attracted to the console market were successful, one of them clearly learned from the battle. Much of Sony's approach to marketing the PlayStation was an evolution of what Sega had done with the Mega Drive – broadening the age demographic and effectively courting third-party publishers.

As a pop culture moment, the war between Sega and Nintendo still resonates, to the point that it's soon to be dramatised as a TV series based on the *Console Wars* book by Blake J Harris. "It was catching the imagination. Interestingly, now because games are totally mass market, that kind of interest isn't there any more because it's just established, like the music industry and the film industry," opines Mike. "But then, to the outside world and to the *Daily Mail* readers, it was one of these curiosities that kind of caught the attention, so we could play on that hugely." Nick agrees that the era was a pivotal time in gaming history. "Nowadays we're used to the latest videogame releases being on the news and being heralded as huge entertainment products, but *Sonic 2* was the first time in most of Europe that a videogame was outselling major movie releases and the most successful books or music tracks," he recalls. "I think that was a turning point, not just for us but actually for the industry, in normal news media going, 'Blimey, actually this is quite big and this is quite serious business.'"

Indeed, gaming is big business now. Platform holders have to make things easy for publishers, for whom writing two different versions of games for two different formats is long past economically viable, so every console has to act like every other. As globalisation and the internet have reshaped our world, localising your marketing message isn't nearly as important as it used to be. To be blunt, a conflict like the one Sega and Nintendo had in the early Nineties isn't just unlikely to happen again – economic realities have changed the games industry to ensure that it never will. But that's why those of us that lived through it will always treasure that time, and that's what ensures it will live on in legend. ✱

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THE EVOLUTION OF URIDIUM

The C64 chart-topper Uridium took inspiration from developer Andrew Braybrook's favourite arcade shooters, and went on to influence a number of follow-ups and full-blown sequels. Andrew explains how the Uridium series evolved

Words by Rory Milne

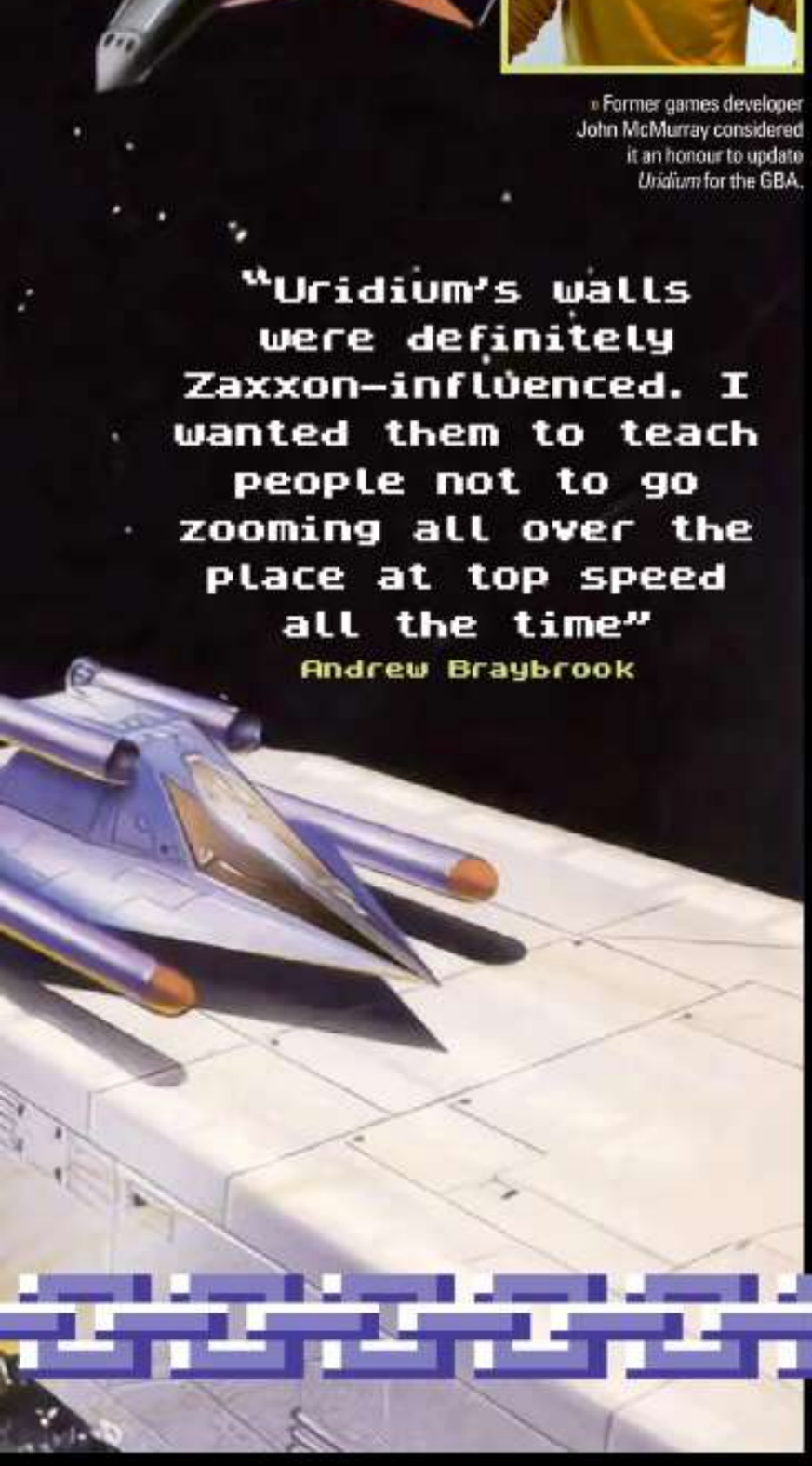
» Andrew Braybrook designed three core *Uridium* titles; two had enhanced modes for more powerful systems.

» Graftgold boss Steve Turner wrote the original *Uridium*'s title music and helped to playtest it.

» Former games developer John McMurray considered it an honour to update *Uridium* for the GBA.

» [C64] The mazelike walls in *Uridium* were influenced by the brick walls in the classic coin-op *Zaxxon*.

"Uridium's walls were definitely Zaxxon-influenced. I wanted them to teach people not to go zooming all over the place at top speed all the time"
Andrew Braybrook



Although *Paradroid* wasn't the first game Andrew Braybrook developed for the C64, it was his first big hit for the system, but since much of the strategic shooter's appeal lay in its original gameplay, the option of producing a similar but improved sequel wasn't one that its author was keen to pursue. Instead, he connected his follow-up – *Uridium* – to its predecessor by basing its design around the destruction of *Paradroid* freighters, although as he explains, he ultimately changed this narrative. "The two games were quite different genres, but they had similar DNA, and making a connection wouldn't have done any harm," Andrew reflects. "But I noted that the scale was different; we wanted the *Uridium* enemy to be giant-sized ships, where as the *Paradroid* freighters were not that big – you could walk from one end to the other in a few seconds, and the *Uridium* Dreadnoughts took longer than that to *fly* across."

Much of *Uridium*'s look and basic gameplay had come about thanks to Andrew visiting the arcades, where the visual style of Tehkan's vertical shoot-'em-up *Star Force* caught his eye, along with some of the core mechanics in *Defender* and *Zaxxon*. "I had been playing *Star Force* a lot in the arcades, and it had a white player ship!" Andrew enthuses. "The graduated greys in its backgrounds really caused the graphics to have a solid look, and it probably influenced *Uridium*'s bright-coloured enemy ships, too. There was an element of *Defender* in *Uridium*'s gameplay: go as fast as you want, wherever you want, from side to side. *Zaxxon* also had a bit to do with it, though I found the arcade game way too hard."

One aspect of *Uridium* took influence from another medium entirely, but Andrew is quick to clarify that the design of its Manta player ship was first and foremost practical. "The objective was to make the player graphic stand out by having white colouring," Andrew points out, "we didn't consciously make it *Star Wars*-like. The Manta was a single-seat fighter, nowhere near as big as the Millennium Falcon, but who couldn't help but be influenced by the mighty *Star Wars* saga?"

Another design decision saw Andrew make *Uridium*'s horizontally scrolling Dreadnoughts far more challenging to fly across, for which he gives credit to a somewhat unforgiving coin-op. "*Uridium*'s walls were definitely *Zaxxon*-influenced," Andrew notes. "I wanted them from day one, to teach people not to go zooming all over the place at top speed all the time. They forced the player down channels to limit their movement for short periods, which added to the peril."

Unlike *Zaxxon*, however, Andrew gave *Uridium* far more involved objectives than the arcade chart-topper's goal of surviving its combative obstacle courses. "The player had to survive a number of waves before landing on the final runway," Andrew observes. "This gave them the initial objective of knocking out the waves while progressing, and then the objective changed to landing the Manta without being shot to pieces. The Manta had plenty of firepower, so destroying lots of scenery for extra points gave another sub-objective: you were there to score as many points as possible."

In theory, Andrew could have made the optional destruction of the Dreadnoughts' ubiquitous scenery essential to getting clearance to land *Uridium*'s Manta, but he had sound reasons not to. "It would have been a ▶

little frustrating on the difficult levels having to go back to take out a couple of extra towers that you missed," Andrew considers. "It would also have required extra mechanisms to show that to the player."

One extra mechanism that Andrew did have memory for came in the form of *Uridium*'s 'Uridimines'; deadly explosive devices that, once triggered, doggedly followed the Manta around the screen until detonation. "The Uridimine algorithm was originally born out of simplicity!" Andrew beams. "They just accelerated towards the player separately in the x and y dimensions. It was a lovely cheap algorithm to implement, which is what I needed when the scrolling routine took up nearly all the CPU time. They were predictable and easy enough to avoid, but they took up your time and held your attention when you would rather have been making progress."

Of course, as well as creating components for *Uridium*'s Dreadnoughts, Andrew also had to construct a fleet of the enemy warships, each one different, but of uniform design.

"I thought Uridium was a little too easy, so I made the Uridium Plus ships a little tougher. Uridium Plus also let you land at any time"

Andrew Braybrook

"The Dreadnoughts were built from blocks of scenery, so a consistent look happened by happy accident," Andrew grins. "I put the main base pieces on, and then I added more detail, targets and decoration, and bits of wall arbitrarily as required. The levels were all done over a short period, so I didn't have enough time to memorise them. That meant each design wasn't influenced by any others."

But once completed, Andrew went back over his Dreadnought designs and ordered them by challenge. "I knew whether I wanted to make each one easy, medium or devilish," Andrew remembers. "Since I had control of which level went where, then I was shuffling them around a bit; there had to be a difficulty line going upwards. Difficulty was mainly defined by the density of the walls as they enclosed the player. On the last couple, I made the player have to roll the Manta onto its side, meaning that swapping direction was going to involve going flat and probably crashing, so the player had to be committed."

Uridium shot up the charts as fast as one of its Mantas at full throttle, but to Andrew's regret his hit shooter fell victim to the sincerest form of flattery. "I was miffed that some people were writing rip-offs of *Uridium*," he frowns. "We even took legal advice, but the barrister reckoned that unless someone had actually nicked any of my code then it would be tricky to make a case. I, therefore, was very keen to make *Uridium Plus* to give people more of the real thing rather than a cheap imitation."

Despite its title, *Uridium Plus* was far more than an enhanced version of its predecessor. As

» [C64] *Uridium*'s dogged homing missiles – Uridimines – are an ingenious mechanic, and they were cheap to code.

» [ZX Spectrum] The Dreadnoughts in the Spectrum *Uridium* are completely different from those in the C64 original.

» [Amstrad CPC] Although a straight port of the Spectrum version, the Amstrad *Uridium* has more sprite colours.

» [BBC Micro] *Uridium* plays well on the BBC, but its sprites are a little blocky.

» [Atari ST] It looks alright in screenshots, but the ST *Uridium* practically runs in slow motion.

» [PC] Although quicker than its Atari ST counterpart, the PC *Uridium* is still not fast enough.

» [NES] This *The Last Starfighter* version of *Uridium* isn't bad, but it has very few enhancements.

well as a new set of Dreadnoughts, it was more difficult, and it turned one of the original's core mechanics on its head. "I thought Uridium was a little too easy, so I made the *Uridium Plus* ships a little tougher," Andrew reasons, "so as the levels progressed the odds increased of enemy ships firing and mine ports producing Uridimines. *Uridium Plus* also let you land at any time, but of course you would get less points, and points led to bonus lives. The 'Land Now!' indicator in *Uridium Plus* was just saying that the really nasty waves were coming, so if you hadn't landed already, then do it."

But not satisfied with outdoing *Uridium* once, Andrew opted to improve further on his original game by coding a Commodore 128 mode for *Uridium Plus*, featuring a bigger starfield and a better-armed Manta. "The C128 had a CPU that could run at double the speed of the C64, but not while it was displaying graphics," Andrew clarifies, "and there were other limiting factors that meant I couldn't really add much – there were no more sprites to use. But I did limit the number of player bullets differently, so the player was going to get more advantage."

Although proving popular when bundled with a faster *Paradroid*, *Uridium Plus* remained Andrew's only C64 variant, although the developer later found himself helping Mindscape with conversions of his game, a process that continued after he returned home. "I believe the story of *The Last Starfighter* stems from the fact that Mindscape wanted to strengthen *Uridium* sales on the NES by adding a movie title," Andrew says of the console port. "We only found out about it some time later, and I don't know who paid whom what. We likely didn't get anything! But I did get a week in Chicago out of it – a working trip, mind."

Around the time that the NES *Uridium* was being developed, Andrew was working on a far more ambitious *Uridium* title of his own, and since *Uridium 2* was an Amiga exclusive he could introduce four-way scrolling to the series. "I deliberately kept the early levels small in height so that no vertical scrolling took place," Andrew recalls. "This maintained the original feel of the game. I could then add a bit of extra height before finally allowing giant-sized layouts. The enemy formations tried to start off lined up with the player, to keep the action focused, and by building horizontal passageways I reduced the vertical scrolling."

Supersizing *Uridium 2*'s Dreadnoughts had a downside, however, in that it became a challenge ▶

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: URIDIUM PLUS

Graftgold's Steve Turner on the two different versions of Uridium Plus

What did you think about the ZX Spectrum *Uridium*'s hidden levels getting released as *Uridium Plus* on compilations?
I thought it was a bit cheeky to release it as a new game, and I didn't really like the whole compilation thing. In my view, our games were put on compilations too early, and putting something like *Uridium Plus* on one carried the compilation.

How did the ZX Spectrum *Uridium Plus* lead to Graftgold making a Commodore 64 *Uridium Plus*?
I think the only connection would have been Hewson asking if we could do a C64 *Uridium Plus* for it. We would have said that we could and asked if it was worth it. Andrew Braybrook probably thought it was a brilliant idea, because he was always going back and tweaking his old games.

How was the Commodore 64 *Uridium Plus* affected by it being made for a package?
I would have said to Andrew that we could do it, but we couldn't afford to spend a lot of time on it. He would have said it would only take him a few days to do if we didn't put any more code in it, and I would have agreed to it.

What made the Commodore 64 *Uridium Plus*/*Fast Paradroid* pack so profitable for Graftgold?
Hewson was doubling-up two of *our* products, so we didn't get watered-down royalties for them. And because we had covered the costs of the games' first releases it was all profit, which really made a difference for us.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: THE LAST STARFIGHTER

Graftgold founder Steve Turner discusses the NES 'Uridium'

Why did Mindscape repackage *Uridium* as *The Last Starfighter*?
Licences came up after films had hit the cinema, and original games took quite a long time to develop, but publishers were keen to get their game into the shops while the film was still in peoples' minds, so I guess that was it, but I don't know.

How much say over *The Last Starfighter* did Graftgold have?
I can't remember being consulted about it at all, but I can remember that we didn't like things about it. Mindscape had replaced the main ship with another graphic that wasn't as good. The explosions weren't as good, either, especially at the end when the Dreadnoughts exploded.

How would Graftgold have done things differently?
If Graftgold had been doing the NES conversion it would be the sort of thing that I could do within days, just to get it up and running. Then we would have thought what we could do to utilise the features of the machine to try and enhance it. It doesn't seem that Mindscape took that second step.

How do you rate *The Last Starfighter* and Mindscape's other versions of *Uridium*?
It at least got the right framerate for *The Last Starfighter*, the other conversions were dreadful. The lack of speed just made them another game. The whole point of *Uridium* was to keep the cycle-rate to the rate of the machine, and Mindscape missed the point with its Atari ST and DOS versions.

» [C64] You don't have to wait for clearance before landing the Manta in *Uridium Plus*.

» [Amiga 1200] *Uridium 2*'s Amiga 1200 'Mayhem Mode' increases the enemy and bullet counts, and adds visual effects.

▶ to find the landing strips on the bigger craft. "The graphics artists were keen to design more complex layouts with larger areas that were impassable, so that you had to find and fight your way through," Andrew notes. "There were also a lot more ground features, vehicles on the surface and nasty lasers, so there was plenty to do and see – but just one little runway to find."

Perhaps by way of compensating for *Uridium 2*'s sometimes less-than-obvious runways, Andrew devised a way for players of his sequel to get cleared to land early. "The 'Land Now!' alert was triggered early if you collected enough 'Victory Points' by destroying a whole wave of fighters, or destroying certain other flying or background targets," Andrew recollects. "It gave the player more choices in how they wanted to play the game, and wrecking the Dreadnoughts' features tied the whole game together better."

But unlike wrecking Dreadnought features in *Uridium*, which could only be done with the original Manta's single weapon, Andrew vastly increased the ways to destroy his sequel's Dreadnought structures by giving *Uridium 2* arcade-inspired power-ups. "I really liked the homing missiles in *Slap Fight*, though they were maybe a little too powerful," Andrew ponders, "that's why *Uridium 2*'s extra weapons were limited in shots. There was a nod to the *Defender* weapon with the lasers, and the forward-firing torpedoes and gunsight were a nod to another favourite arcade game – *Xevious*, and also to one of the failed weapons modes in *Paradroid*."

Another of Andrew's C64 games influenced a different aspect of *Uridium 2*, more specifically its radar, although the sequel's radar jammers were entirely original. "*Morpheus* helped. I had divided its sprite co-ordinates and plotted pixels into a small character block for its radar," Andrew reviews. "The radar for *Uridium 2* showed a scaled-down ship layout as a silhouette plus enemy ships as plots. But I thought it made the game a bit too easy, so I implemented jammers, where if one was in range it partially covered the radar in interference, and two just knocked it out. Although if you could bomb or shoot the jammers then you got your radar back."

> **"I really liked the homing missiles in Slap Fight, though they were maybe a little too powerful, that's why Uridium 2's extra weapons were limited in shots"**
> Andrew Braybrook

But given *Uridium 2*'s growing list of innovations, it's perhaps unsurprising that something had to be cut, and the obvious candidate was the follow-up's original sub-game. "I had a *Paradroid*-like sequence with the player(s) inside the Dreadnought," Andrew sighs, "but this turned out to be slightly too ambitious in terms of volume of graphics, and I couldn't think of a decent objective. The scrolling area was going to make whatever there was to do in there complex, and sending the player into a firefight to destroy a reactor in a large area might have lasted a while, which was just what the game didn't need."

» [Amiga] Like *Uridium*, *Uridium 2*'s earlier Dreadnoughts only scroll horizontally, but later models also scroll vertically.

» [Amiga] There's a two-player co-op option in *Uridium 2*, unlike *Uridium*'s two-player mode, where you take turns.

» [GBA] The power-ups in *Uridium Advance* require you to speed off after them and catch them.

By comparison, less compromise was needed when Andrew added a 'Mayhem Mode' to his sequel, although this required the game to be run on an Amiga 1200. "I had implemented an object count limiter to stop too much from happening on the base Amiga," Andrew explains. "It allowed a certain number of enemy ships and bullets at once, but no more. Well that didn't apply on an A1200, so there were no limits on the number of anything the game could generate, memory was not an issue, and I had smoke trails on the homing missiles, which we couldn't afford the time for on the standard machine."

Work on two enhanced versions of *Uridium 2* was started subsequently. An Amiga 1200-specific build with some improved visual effects was completed, but never found its way to store shelves, while the development of a CD32 variant was left unfinished. "Sales of *Uridium 2* had not been too good," Andrew concedes, "so the CD32 version was abandoned halfway through. I am still bitter about that. We had run out of development time, as the main game had taken a lot longer than we expected."

A decade later, the new owner of the *Uridium* rights – Jester Interactive – was set to continue Andrew's series on the Game Boy Advance, although the finished game wasn't released, and Andrew has only recently seen it in action. "The time to get involved in such a project would have been before the start," Andrew reckons, "but there was no contact that I know of. I *am* quite interested in the technical capabilities of the GBA *now*; it looks to have quite a lot of graphical power, and I'll need to study *Uridium Advance* on there."

When asked what a modern-day *Uridium* might look like, Andrew has the beginnings of a great idea for an up-to-date implementation, but he uses his closing remarks to make clear that he has no plans to lead that potential venture's development. "You'd have to start with everything that has gone before and move on from there," Andrew contemplates. "I've seen some interesting modern variations, but nothing with the speed, nor dare I say it, finesse of the original. I do often imagine what a pilot's eye view would look like, but *Uridium 2* took a long time to get done, and I couldn't face another project like that!" ★

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: URIDIUM ADVANCE

John McMurray remembers his unreleased GBA Uridium

How did Tin Tiger end up developing *Uridium Advance* for Jester Interactive?
Because it was only the three of us we had to aim small, and Steve Cain had a long track record of doing 2D graphics, so a Game Boy Advance game seemed like a reasonable idea. We had connections to Jester Interactive, and basically we got this offer.

What made *Uridium Advance* different from *Uridium*?
The structures that caused instadeath in *Uridium* became obstacles to be negotiated, because I wanted to concentrate on the speed. We put power-ups in, and quite a lot of the time you found yourself chasing them. You also had to destroy a percentage of the Dreadnoughts with bombs.

How did *Uridium 2* influence *Uridium Advance*'s Dreadnoughts?
I never saw *Uridium 2*, to be honest. But the vertical scrolling in *Uridium Advance* just made the levels a bit wider. It gave you that extra bit of space to manoeuvre, and added a little more exploration when you were looking for those last few targets to destroy.

How complete was *Uridium Advance*, and how do you feel about it now?
Uridium Advance was finished, but I think on its own it was too slight to release as a full-price cartridge, hence the idea of doing a two-game bundle with *Paradroid*. But it's nice that *Uridium Advance* has been remembered by someone, because a lot of hard work went into it, and it all came to nought, really.

Conversion Kings

URIDIUM

Graftgold's Commodore 64 hit Uridium couldn't be converted to the ZX Spectrum – even the firm's founder Steve Turner agreed. But as Steve tells **Retro Gamer**, a quick look at Dominic Robinson's Spectrum Uridium demo completely changed his mind

Words by Rory Milne

The UK's top two home computers during the Eighties – the ZX Spectrum and the Commodore 64 – had very different hardware, which made it challenging to convert games that played to one system's strengths to its rival. But in the case of Graftgold's *Uridium*, the firm's chart-topper had been so intrinsically designed around the C64's inner workings that a conversion to the Spectrum was dismissed out of hand.

Graftgold's founder Steve Turner also took this view, but then a demo forced both him and his publisher Hewson Consultants to revaluate their positions. "Andrew Hewson had asked me about converting *Uridium* to the Spectrum, and I'd just said that it wasn't worth spending the time on with the techniques that I had at the time," Steve concedes. "Then later on he happened to mention Dominic Robinson's demo, although he didn't think he could make it into a game. But I was just blown away by it – demo or not. I thought, 'Wow! This is something else.' I hadn't ever seen that sort of thing on the Spectrum."

Although initially doubtful, Hewson's boss was convinced by Steve of the merits of Dominic's demo, and this led to the firm employing the young developer. "I said then and there, 'Sign him up; this guy is worth his salt!'" Steve enthuses. "Because I knew *Uridium* well, and I knew that there wasn't actually a lot of 'game' code in it; it was quite straightforward. So I knew Dominic could probably turn his demo into *Uridium*, and I think that when Hewson talked to him further everyone there was so impressed that they got him in-house."

The challenges facing Dominic on starting his job weren't insignificant, however, as his demo's Dreadnoughts took up a lot of space. "I'm pretty sure all Dominic had in his *Uridium* demo was the sideways scrolling, and we had to encourage him to make it into the game," Steve remembers. "First of all, he thought there was no way that it could be done. The Dreadnoughts were quite big, and he had to have them eight times in [the] memory, so they completely filled the Spectrum."

But in keeping with the novel approach that he had taken when producing his *Uridium* demo, Dominic solved his full-blown version's memory problems by dispensing with conventional coding wisdom. "It was a question of making his demo more compressed so that he could squash the other code in," Steve notes, "and then he had to write that code in as small a portion as he could. Dominic had to virtually turn programming on its head to do it, and that took someone really clever, who was not only conceiving ideas, but was also working in such a different way."

Dominic's approach to squeezing *Uridium* into a Spectrum equated to coding without a safety net and employing tricks that other developers wouldn't consider. "Dominic didn't seem to distinguish between data and code; his graphics actually had the code to put them on the screen wrapped around them," Steve reveals. "He also used a 'dirty cell' mechanism, where once he had done the background he kept the bits that the manta and the enemy craft were flying over – because the ships disturbed the background, and he then plotted the ships over the bits that he had kept."

» [ZX Spectrum] As with the original, manoeuvring in tight spaces is a hallmark of the Spectrum version of *Uridium*.

Naturally, Steve and *Uridium*'s original creator Andrew Braybrook were keen to assess Dominic's ZX Spectrum version on its completion, but given Steve's early involvement, their approval was all but guaranteed. "Dominic understood that the critical thing was the framerate, so I don't think Andrew and I really had anything detrimental to say about it at all," Steve recalls. "I was very pleased with it. I think Andrew hadn't expected much from it because it was for the Spectrum, but he was pleasantly surprised about the way that it handled."

But not satisfied with achieving the seemingly impossible, Dominic and his design partner – John Cumming – spent a weekend producing a second set of Dreadnoughts that could be unlocked with a code. "There was just a 'bit' that had to be flicked to turn the hidden levels on," Steve recalls. "I suppose they added them because Dominic was so proud to have some memory left over. He had just managed to get so much compression in there, which was brilliant really, and he didn't need much memory for them, because they used existing graphics."

However, rather than immediately telling his boss – Andrew Hewson – about this Easter egg, Dominic kept his hidden fleet secret until just before the game's release. "Perhaps he thought that he would get into trouble for doing something that he wasn't

INFO

» C64 RELEASE: 1986

» ZX SPECTRUM RELEASE: 1986

» CONVERSION CODER: DOMINIC ROBINSON

» AVERAGE SCORE: 92%

» Steve Turner convinced Dominic Robinson to turn his ZX Spectrum *Uridium* demo into a full game.

» [ZX Spectrum] Like the original *Uridium*, the Spectrum version is peppered with deadly raised structures.

» [ZX Spectrum] Other than their names, the Spectrum *Uridium*'s hidden levels and the Spectrum *Uridium Plus* stages are identical.

» [ZX Spectrum] Both games have you negotiating obstacles under heavy fire.

meant to do, because he was on the payroll by that time," Steve theorises. "But it's strange, because I would have thought Hewson would have announced the hidden levels straightaway."

But while Dominic and John had found room to fit in extra Dreadnoughts, they didn't have space for the original's post-level Dreadnought destructions. "I think it was purely a matter of trying to squash it all in; Dominic had to be really drastic with what he included," Steve points out. "The Dreadnought flyovers would have been cheap to do, and someone of Dominic's brilliance could have somehow destroyed the Dreadnought graphics as they scrolled along. Although they would have taken extra coding, and I know it was really crammed in there in the end, so he may have had them in at one time and had to take them out."

Another feature of the C64 *Uridium* was also left out of the ZX Spectrum version, specifically the original's fruit machine-inspired bonus game, although in reviewing Dominic's conversion Steve is happy to let this minor omission slide. "The bonus game would have needed different graphics, so that likely became a candidate to cut to give Dominic more memory," Steve reasons. "But I was quite happy, because it was purely a little bit of relaxation at the end of a level, and I was just amazed that he and John could get *Uridium* in the machine at all." ✱

HOW ACCURATE IS IT?

ORIGINAL (COMMODORE 64)

Full speed ahead
■ Although not as fast as its C64 counterpart, the Spectrum version does run quickly enough to capture the original's essence.

Dreadnought deviation
■ They have the same names, but the Spectrum *Uridium*'s Dreadnoughts have completely different designs from the C64 version's.

CONVERSION (ZX SPECTRUM)

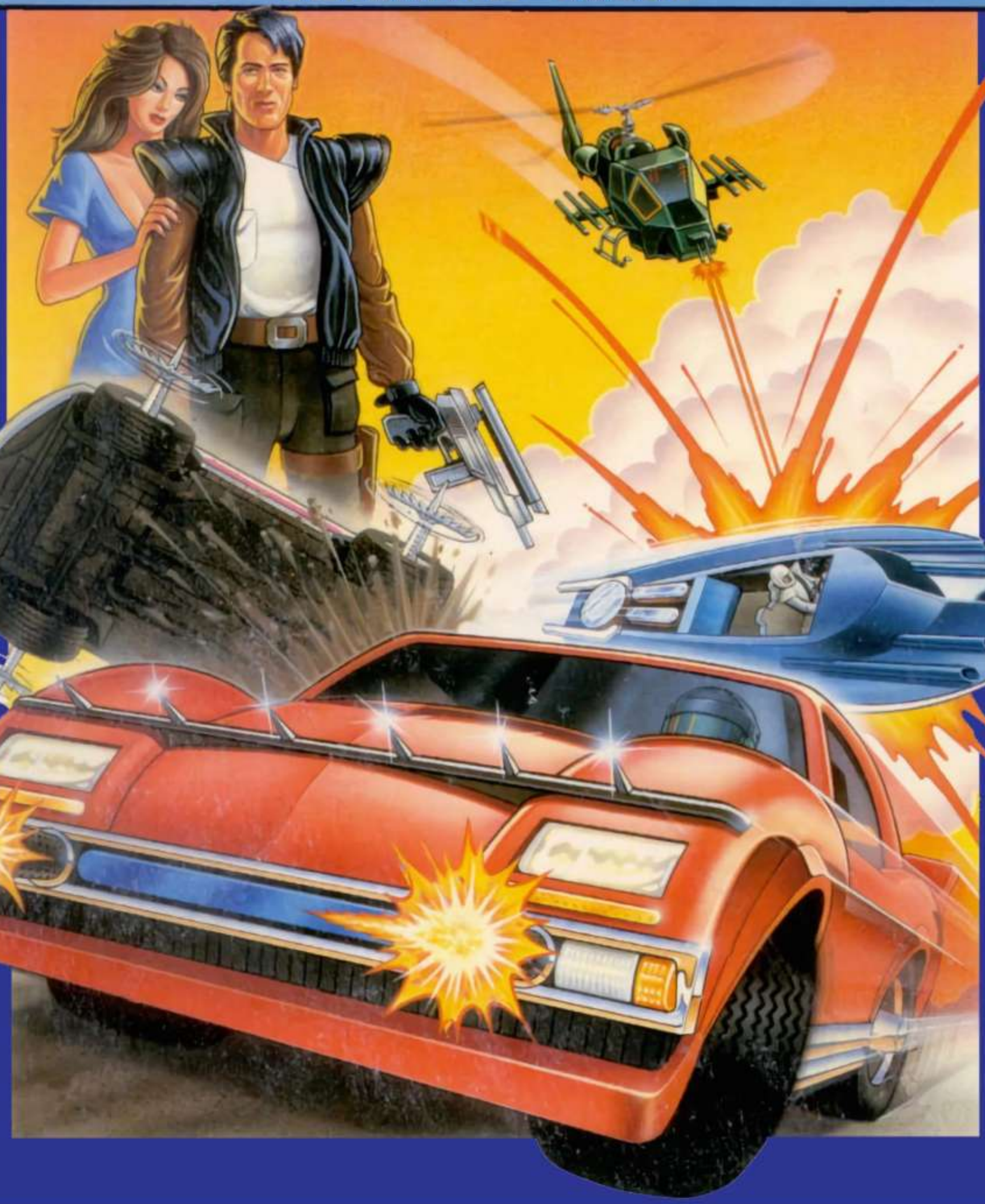
Colour constraints
■ The Spectrum *Uridium*'s Dreadnoughts are almost completely monochrome, but its stars are multicoloured, unlike the original.

Sounds reasonable
■ Considering the hardware, the Spectrum *Uridium* does a decent job of replicating the original's audio.

Secret Spectrum levels
■ First press 1, 2 or 3 to access the options screen, hold down then release the QWERT keys, press X, and then start the game.

SPY HUNTER

ULTIMATE GUIDE



[Arcade] The slippery puddles are often cunningly placed.

INNOCENT MOTORIST (SALOON)

A sleek sit-down cabinet. Car-mounted machine guns. The smooth Peter Gunn theme. Devilish villains, and groovy gadgets. Could Bally Midway's famous vehicular arcade game be any cooler? We reckon not... floor it!

Words by Graeme Mason

SWITCH BLADE 150 POINTS

SITTING BATS

ARMED SWITCH BLADE 150 POINTS

INNOCENT MOTORIST (HATCHBACK)

SPY CAR

After almost 60 years since the release of the first *James Bond* film, the appeal and influence of the glamorous spy is as strong as ever. By 1983, the original star, Sean Connery, had left the franchise and the Roger Moore-starring *Octopussy* was resident in cinemas. Arriving around the same time in arcades, with a similar verve and swagger, came *Spy Hunter,* Bally Midway's interpretation of one of the most popular aspects of the spy genre, and movies in general: the car chase.

In *Spy Hunter*, the player takes on the role of a super spy, chasing down bad guys on the highways and waterways of an undefined location. The star of the show is the player's car, the fictional and Chevy Camaro-esque G-6155 Interceptor, and the mission is simple: take down the various armoured and lethal opponent cars, while protecting the innocent motorists on the road. To help the hero, there's a whole Q branch – or the American equivalent – ready in trucks, each laden with offensive improvements for the player's souped-up car. In addition to the standard front-facing machine guns, oil slicks and smoke deter any chasing vehicles, while missiles are essential to eradicate the enemy helicopter that swirls overhead, dropping bombs.

With there being no discernible end to the game, *Spy Hunter* is the perfect videogame for high score chasers. 15 points are awarded for every quarter of the screen travelled, with 25 points for the equivalent distance on water. In a neat twist (and a nod to the speedboat chase of 1973's *Live And Let Die*), the player will periodically be confronted with an impending broken bridge. If you want to avoid plummeting into the depths, keep to the left and navigate a narrow road leading to a small boathouse. From here, the car transforms into a speedboat, but things are no safer on the river: enemies drop explosive drums into the water while the larger enemies attempt to ram the spy and launch torpedoes in their direction. Over both land and sea, a

CRASHED SPY BOAT

MOTORBIKE

» [Arcade] This reverse boathouse converts the speedboat back to a car.

» [Arcade] Things are heating up on this – thankfully intact – bridge.

» [Arcade] This bridge is indeed, out.

» [Arcade] The bucolic scene brackets this dangerous road.

"We normally used the same code base for the gameplay where possible, substituting the graphics and graphics routines"

SEAN PEARCE

helicopter, sometimes called the mad bomber, harasses the player and can only be taken down by a well-timed missile.

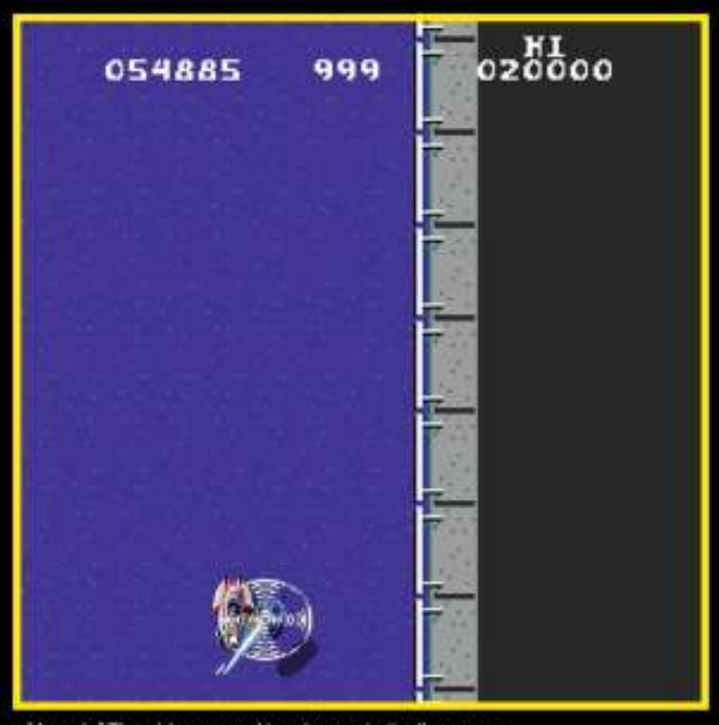
Back on the road, there's a lot more than that chopper to worry about. Bumper cars, known as road lords, are impervious to machinegun fire and try to shove the player off the road. The smaller bruiser cars (switchblades) are harmless until razor-sharp spikes emerge from their wheels; let one of these bad boys touch you and it's a quick spin into the nearby scenery. The longer, slimmer enforcers must be handled with care – inside each one are shotgun-wielding thugs, ready to lean out of the window and pump bullets in your direction. A destroyed enemy yields points, from 150 for the switchblades and road lords to 500 for each enforcer, and 700 for the mad bomber.

Also on the road are a selection of innocent civilians, going about their daily routine. They must be dodged to avoid unwanted collision and not get caught in any crossfire; should one wander into your firing line, the scoring is suspended temporarily as a punishment. There are also puddles which make the spy car temporarily lose grip and, worse, the occasional icy stretch of road that causes all vehicles to slip haphazardly across the tarmac. And it's a busy road to negotiate – but fortunately there's help at hand. Trucks will appear sporadically in front of your car; allow them to hover in front of you and a ramp will lower. Drive into the awaiting truck and one of the special add-ons is installed, which can then be used three times. *Spy Hunter* also possesses an unusual timer and life combination. The game initially counts down from 60 or 90 seconds (depending on dip switch settings), during which the player essentially has infinite lives – although crashing eats up valuable time waiting for the truck to reappear. Once this time has elapsed, it's back to a traditional life counter, with an extra two spies (or 'bases' as the game notes) awarded should the player make it to 18,000 points before the timer runs out.

With complex racers such as *Out Run* still distant, *Spy Hunter* presents a traditional top-down view with scenery whizzing past on each side. In an era when many arcade games were still one-screen affairs, its lightning-fast scrolling and breathless speeding chases were enough to elevate the game into a smash. And like its peer *Star Wars*, released in arcades the same year, *Spy Hunter* boasts an impressive sit-down cabinet, complete with a futuristic *Knight Rider*-style steering wheel, a range of buttons for the various weapons at the player's disposal (all housed on the wheel), a gas pedal and gear shifter. The same game is accommodated within a stand-up coin-op which, while less striking, retains much of the charm and all of the exciting gameplay.

Designed in-house at Bally Midway, *Spy Hunter* conjures up memories of over-the-top Eighties movies and TV shows such as *Starsky & Hutch*. It's a tough game, with marauding enemies swarming constantly, and also never-ending – a pure high-score-attack thrill ride. The melding of the driving and shoot-'em-up genres was an inspired invention, as was the panic-inducing 'bridge out'

» [Arcade] The spy's Interceptor is equipped with infinite ammo.



» [Arcade] The airborne mad bomber periodically turns up to harass the player. Better have a missile or two handy.

PLAYING TIPS

SPY HARD

WE PRESENT (00)7 TIPS TO MASTERING THIS SPY CAPER

THE SPY WHO SMOKED ME

If you want to survive for any length of time, the smoke and oil extras are essential, given they firmly deter all chasing villains. When you spot a truck, slow down and let it overtake so you can jump on board and let the boffins do their thing.

DOCTOR FLOW

The river may be quieter, but it is no less dangerous seeing that the two types of enemies launch explosive drums and try to ram our spy. With no add-ons available, you may wish to get back on dry land sooner rather than later.

THE BRIDGE IS NOT ENOUGH

It's one of *Spy Hunter*'s most iconic moments: BRIDGE OUT – DETOUR ON LEFT! You should better do as it says, because there's no escaping a plunge into the river should you decide to stick to the main road.

FROM RUSSIA WITH ICE

When the white landscape appears, it's time to drive carefully, or as carefully as you can while being chased by a pack of rabid spies. The tyres squeak and spin across the now-slippery road, making the narrow lanes even more hazardous.

THE CAR WITH THE MOUNTED GUN

It may seem obvious today, but in 1983 the combination of racing and shooting had rarely been explored. *Spy Hunter* changed all that and engineered a whole new genre. It's your main weapon and never runs out – but watch out for those innocent motorists!

POTHOLES ARE FOREVER

Sure feels like it, and they are caused by the mad bomber and his crusade against the hero. Each bomb creates a hole which sends the spy spinning into any nearby vehicles, or the scenery to the side of the road. Break out the missiles and take down that chopper asap.

A BLADE TO A KILL

Watch out for the switchblades! Not only do they appear with alarming regularity, they are also deadly to the touch once their blades are extended. No amount of skilled driving will save you once your car's tyres are shredded by these bad boys.

» [Arcade] *Spy Hunter*'s car transforms into this rather natty speedboat.

» [Arcade] Sssmoookin'!

dynamic. Not only did the player have enemy spies in cars and helicopters to contend with – there was also a danger that the road ahead of them would disappear, leaving them no choice but to take to the water, one way or the other.

Buoyed by *Spy Hunter*'s success, Bally Midway swiftly commissioned a sequel. Eschewing the pure top-down perspective, *Spy Hunter II* employs an ill-advised semi-angled display that removes much of the excitement of the original. The sit-down cabinet failed to reappear, as well, although the game's twin controls of its stand-up cabinet still looks undeniably hip. The sequel came and went (as did a pinball interpretation), and after the home conversions appeared throughout the mid-to-late Eighties, *Spy Hunter* got the NES-exclusive upgrade *Super Spy Hunter* in 1992.

A 2001 PS2 game, developed by Paradigm Entertainment, swelled the background story and missions, while echoing the original thanks to its sleek and dangerous G-6155 Interceptor. That game had its own sequel in 2003, while the last main game was in 2012 for Nintendo 3DS and PS Vita. It's also worth pointing out the neat buildable G-6155 (along with the original arcade game) from 2016's *Lego Dimensions Midway Arcade* set.

But it is with that first *Spy Hunter* game, from the febrile arcades of 1983, that the legend was truly born. Hyper-frenzied and exhilarating, the experience of sitting within that sit-down machine while taking on enemy agents in a high-speed chase, accompanied by the suave and jazzy Peter Gunn theme, is one that will never fade for those lucky enough to have experienced it.

CONVERSION CAPERS

HOW THE DIFFERENT ITERATIONS OF SPY HUNTER SHAPE UP

PC

■ An average port of not the most complex of arcade games. In truth, it plays okay, but only just about, and must be experienced in RGB in order to avoid the blurred visuals that make it all a bit tough on the eyes.

COMMODORE 64

■ Another fantastic 8-bit conversion, faithfully replicating all the thrills and shooting action of the arcade game. Unlike the Speccy version, the Peter Gunn theme is present and correct, as are the alternating terrains. Everything looks pretty good too, adding up to another solid early hit for US Gold.

ATARI 800

■ This conversion is very similar to the Commodore 64 game – only without quite as much chaos present on the roads, which makes the game pleasingly easier to play. Bright, first-rate graphics complement the tight controls, making this edition of *Spy Hunter* a must-play for any Atari 800 owner.

COLECOVISION

■ While it plays a touch on the slow side, there's lots to admire here. The sprites are excellent, and the svelte theme by Henry Mancini is also present. The information panel sits on the left too, giving the player a much better view of what's coming, although the roads are a little quieter than we'd like.

ZX SPECTRUM

■ With its well-designed sprites, there's much to love about Spectrum *Spy Hunter*, and it plays well, too, with the scrolling smooth and transfer from car to boat handled acceptably. With only a lack of sound letting this caper down, *Spy Hunter* became a regular staple of Speccy compilations, including four Smashes in *Crash*.

BBC MICRO

■ This BBC game is probably the nicest-looking of the 8-bit home computer ports of *Spy Hunter* – it's just a shame that it lacks the excitement of the arcade original's manic gameplay due to the empty and boring lengths of road. Where are all the enemy spies?

AMSTRAD CPC

■ The rights for the Amstrad version were acquired by Amsoft, which contracted North Ireland's Choice Software to create the game. Sadly, it's the poorest of the 8-bit home computer ports, with its choppy scrolling and slow pace fatally hampering a game that relies on speed and excitement. It never saw a full-price release, eventually squeaking out on US Gold's budget label, Kixx.

APPLE II

■ The Interceptor looks very nice in this Apple II port, with its red and white flashes making it as conspicuous as every other James Bond vehicle. There's little else to praise, however, as the long straights make for a very boring game, coupled with a range of beeps and dots that fail on any level to convey the tension of a high-speed chase. There's no water section, either.

ATARI 2600

■ Another wonderfully smart and fine arcade conversion for the creaking Atari console. While the original's simplicity helps, all the features are present, albeit with a plainer background and sprites. The original cartridge was packaged with a joystick 'coupler' unit that connected two Atari 2600 joysticks together, giving the player the riches of – woo! – two buttons.

NES

■ Opinions of this NES port can be a tad divisive. True, it's a faithful recreation of the original, and even offers improved background graphics, including some rudimentary cityscapes. But on a system that often improved its home conversions immeasurably, it's a bit of a disappointment, something Sunsoft would go some way to correct with 1992's *Super Spy Hunter*.

Q&A: SEAN PEARCE

WE CHAT TO THE MAN BEHIND SPY HUNTER'S AMSTRAD PORT

Hi Sean – from where did you develop *Spy Hunter*?
I worked at Choice Software – 'Northern Ireland's own Software Company' – in my home town of Carrickfergus. The company was started by some friends I had met at the local computer club in the town's library, Colin Gordon and David Bolton.

What was your role on Amstrad *Spy Hunter*?
I did all the code and it looks like I did much of the graphics myself as well, although I think the cars and scenery graphics were provided. Often the company we were working for would supply some graphics – for example, it looks like F David Thorpe did the loading screen.

What did you have to sacrifice in order to get the game working well on the Amstrad CPC?
The scrolling and lack of in-game music are the most obvious omissions, but I tried to capture most of the relevant features such as the behaviours of the cars, picking up new weapons and so on.

How do you think you did?
In hindsight, it was not a great conversion. The shooting was too slow and the mapping of the roads a little flawed, with some obvious bugs in the drop-off from the van into some impossible situations. But then usually Choice were involved in platform conversions, most often working for releases published by Ocean and US Gold. I guess this must have been a very time-pressured conversion – they probably had the Commodore 64 and Spectrum versions ready for release.

They were likely already out! We're guessing you didn't have an arcade machine to work from?
When we worked on ZX Spectrum and Amstrad versions of games, we normally used the same codebase for the gameplay where possible, substituting the graphics and graphics routines. I don't believe we had an arcade machine in this instance, although I can see there are a lot of aspects to the gameplay, so I must have had some exposure to it.

Do you know why Amsoft never released the game, and it never saw the light of day until a budget re-release?
Sorry, no idea! We completed the work on time as far as I recall.

[Arcade] The vulnerable motorcyclists must be avoided.

[Arcade] These handy trucks provide a neat optional extra.

Don't
FLY

Dynamite Headdy

FOUR HEADS ARE BETTER THAN ONE

» MEGA DRIVE » 1994 » TREASURE

One of the greatest things about being a Mega Drive owner is being able to experience early Treasure games. Consisting of ex-Konami devs, Treasure hit the ground running on Sega's 16-bit console, kicking off with the spectacular *Gunstar Heroes*, a title which remains one of the best run-and-guns on the system.

Treasure's second game was *McDonald's Treasure Land Adventure*, a licensed platformer that puts you in the oversized shoes of Ronald McDonald. It's an entertaining game, but it failed to deliver on the giddy excitement the team had achieved with its riotous debut. Thank goodness, then, for *Dynamite Headdy*, a ridiculously silly platformer that features everything you'd want from a Treasure game – cutting-edge visuals and a deliciously absurd sense of humour.

From the moment Treasure's game starts it simply doesn't let up. Headdy runs off with a group of mates in tow and is immediately ambushed by a gigantic robot, who proceeds to stuff Headdy's friends into an oversized sack. Our hero's quest to rescue them sees him face off against the weirdest bosses to ever grace the Mega Drive, with mayors ranging from a giant wind-up clockwork hound called Mad Dog, to Spinderalla, a crimson, circular robot who pounds at Headdy with its massive arms. The best of the bunch, though, is Baby Face, and he could well be one of my favourite Treasure bosses of all time.

Rising up from a base of clouds, a cute robotic baby head appears, and it soon begins showering you with fiery projectiles. Once you pepper him with enough bullets (it's effectively a shmup level, by the way) his face splits in two to reveal the evolved head of a robotic man, complete with a deadly finger that fires off electric bolts. Defeating this form gives way to a third, older head, before leaving you to battle the head of an ancient old man who continually attempts to grab you with his gnarled hands. It's one of the wackiest encounters the game offers, and it always manages to impress me whenever I revisit it. ✱

Minority Report

INTERESTING GAMES YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED

COMMODORE 64

The 8-bit micro received a diverse range of titles, from puzzle games to shooters, strategy and sports. Here are some titles from those genres that may not be well known, but are definitely worth playing

Words by Andrew Fisher

» [C64] The central generator in the third level produces extra red spheres for you to push around. The first Power Pills are located here.

» [C64] Ants move unpredictably and are difficult to deal with. Grab the Wing Part here on level four – it's necessary for the next level.

MOTOS

■ DEVELOPER: **MAD** ■ YEAR: **1987**

■ **Arcade licences were expensive for developers in the late Eighties, so Mastertronic struck a cost-effective deal with Namco for some of its older titles.** The result was three interesting conversions released on the MAD label, at a bargain price for the time of £2.99. *Motos* is a particularly obscure Namco title that has largely been forgotten, which is a real shame. The game reached arcades in 1985, using the *Super Pac-Man* hardware enhanced with the graphics chip found in *Mappy* and *The Tower Of Druaga*.

Although it features enemies to defeat, *Motos* is not a shoot-'em-up. Players control the Motos buggy, using its speed and weight to push enemies off the platforms that made up the level, viewed from overhead. If the buggy is pushed off the edge, a life is lost and the level restarted – minus any enemies that had already been defeated. Early rounds have a simple square arrangement, but later encounters have gaps to fall into and tiles that are cracked. All the objects in the game have weight, meaning the buggy must use speed and its strength to push them about. Spheres get heavier and larger; blue and red orbs are lighter than the black ones, and later levels feature large red and white balls to push away. Insect-like enemies get stronger and move more erratically, and generators release more spheres onto the screen (until the starting enemies on that round have been conquered). Take too long to complete a round and shooting stars start to fall out of the sky. If they hit the player, a life is lost. Otherwise, the star will destroy the tile it lands on.

To help the buggy, power-ups can be collected. 'Power Pills' increase the strength of the vehicle, allowing it to push back heavier enemies. 'Wing Parts' allow it to jump with a press of the fire button, but landing cracks the tiles underneath, making them unsafe for both the player and heavier enemies. In another unusual twist, the player decides which parts to use from their stock before the round starts (and chooses again for each new life). Some levels also feature bonus diamonds, which are pushed off the platform for an extra 1,000 points. The increasing difficulty level provides a real challenge.

The home computer ports did not arrive until 1987 and were handled by Manchester's Binary Design, which provided several C64 games for Mastertronic, including *180* and *Zub*. The C64 version of *Motos* was

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

BOSCONIAN 87

C64, 1987

■ Binary Design took on the Namco classic and updated it, with a fuel system and bombs to collect. Destroy enemy stations by shooting away the hexagonal turrets, or by hitting the central eye that shields itself. Waves of fighters launch to stop you, although the small playing area is disappointing.

GAPLUS

C64, 1988

■ Ash Routledge and Dave Saunders took over porting duties from Binary Design for this *Galaga* sequel, with music by Jeroen Tel. Shoot the Mother Galaga for weapons - including the Tractor Beam to grab enemies as extra firepower, and the Cyclone to slow enemies down. A great starfield and metallic graphics impress.

OUT OF THIS WORLD

C64, 1988

■ Jason Brooke provided music for this shoot-'em-up, which is the closest the C64 got to a conversion of Sega's *Fantasy Zone*. It had a rather harsh review from *Zzap!64*, but there is still fun to be had across eight levels, blasting enemies that release coloured pods to activate your extra weapons.

IN DEPTH

» [C64] The shooting star has started making holes in the platform on round 19, so get rid of the last two red spheres quickly.

programmed by Michael Delves (who also converted *Glider Rider* to the C64), with graphics by Lee Cawley. The graphics are good, though they don't quite recreate the metallic style of the original arcade game. Sound effects and music are by the underrated Jason C Brooke, with different jingles and a fast-paced main tune (using two channels so sound effects can be heard at the same time). Most importantly, the arcade game design transferred to the home computer intact, with 27 increasingly tough rounds filled with enemies to conquer. Level 27 is shaped 'MD' for programmer Michael Delves before the game restarts. *Motos* is a forgotten gem that deserves to be revisited.

POWER PILLS

■ These are collected by running over them. Activating one or more gives more strength, but on completing the level any active Pills are removed from the stock.

STOCKS

■ Collected power-ups are stored here, with the right column showing lives remaining. Before each level and new life, moving down activates an item or up returns it to the stock.

WING PARTS

■ Wing Parts are also collected by running over them, and, once activated, allow the player to jump over gaps. Landing from a jump does crack the tiles, so be careful.

THE ENEMY

■ Level five has a single large enemy. It is best to use at least one Power Pill and the Wing Parts for this screen, so you can jump out of its way to collect the items first.

Minority Report

BULLY'S SPORTING DARTS

■ PUBLISHER: **ALTERNATIVE** ■ YEAR: **1992**

■ **Stephen Walters produced many great C64 budget games, such as *3D Pinball Power* for Mastertronic and *American 3D Pool* for Zeppelin.** This unusual licence for Alternative was based on the cartoon bull (known as Bully) from TV game show *Bullseye*, and features seven different games played on a dartboard. Bully appears on the menus, and as a small sprite giving a 'thumbs up' when a good dart is thrown. Control is handled by moving the floating hand and timing the release, much like other computer darts games. 501 and Round The Clock play in the normal darts way, although the latter allows doubles and trebles to advance quicker.

The other five games are based on real sports and use the dartboard in interesting ways. Snooker requires the player to make a break by shooting a red number (three hits) and then a colour (four hits, with double and triple counting as more than one). Tennis sees the server hit doubles and the receiver to hit triples to keep a rally going (with two darts each). Football plays out as a tug-of-war around the top half of the board, with the numbers at each end acting as a goal. Cricket has one team scoring more than 40 with three darts to earn runs, and the opponent hitting the inner or outer bull to bowl wickets. (The batting team can run themselves out by hitting the bullseye.) Finally, Golf sees the numbers one to 18 represent a hole on the course; each hole is a par-three, and hitting a triple scores a hole in one. The computer player has nine levels of skill, with the top levels being tricky to beat. Step up to the digital oche and chuck some arrows.

» [C64] With numbers representing either red (one point) or colours (two to seven points), Bully gives the thumbs up for a break of 28.

» [C64] Having completed the first hole with a par score, hitting the triple two gives the player an excellent start to the round.

» [C64] The computer opponent (Australia) has just taken a wicket by hitting the outer bull. Cue an England collapse...

MORE GAMES TO PLAY

» AIGINA'S PROPHECY

■ DEVELOPER: **VIC TOKAI**
■ YEAR: **1986**

■ Based on the arcade game *Baluba-Louk No Densetsu* and its Famicom follow-up, this was developed by Software Creations for the Japanese publisher. Mixing RPG and platformer game design, you'll find weapons to kill enemies, keys to open chests and new areas, and five star parts to save the world. The NES release was cancelled, as was *Chester Field*; the C64 got a port of that side-scrolling RPG from Vic Tokai.

» CHICKEN

■ DEVELOPER: **ELECTRIC BOYS**
■ YEAR: **1995**

■ This game from the end of the C64's commercial era is often credited to the late John Ferrari. Inspired by arcade game *Head-On*, two pickup trucks roam around a network of roads trying to knock each other out; collecting a girder gives 'crunch power' to damage the opponent. Matches create fires, oil makes an opponent reverse their direction and shields protect you in this frenetic battler.

» HARD 'N' HEAVY

■ DEVELOPER: **RELINE SOFTWARE**
■ YEAR: **1989**

■ When *The Great Giana Sisters* was pulled from shop shelves, work on its sequel was stopped and eventually turned into this game. Two robots, Hard and Heavy, must explore Mars to find lithium crystals, with limited smart bombs and shields to help them. Interesting two-player modes, a chance for one player to practice the level they died on and secret levels to find make this deeper than many platform games.

» SUBSONIC

■ DEVELOPER: **MIKE AGER, HAYDN DALTON**
■ YEAR: **1992**

■ Only published on a cover tape, this has gorgeous sprites by Haydn Dalton and was coded by Software Creations' Mike Ager. It's a fun *Galaga*-style shooter with an optional second player. Power-ups can be shot to send them to your side, while shooting bonus Boblins grants you a points boost – with a neat high score entry system. Swirling attack waves are accompanied by a great tune from Jens-Christian Huus.

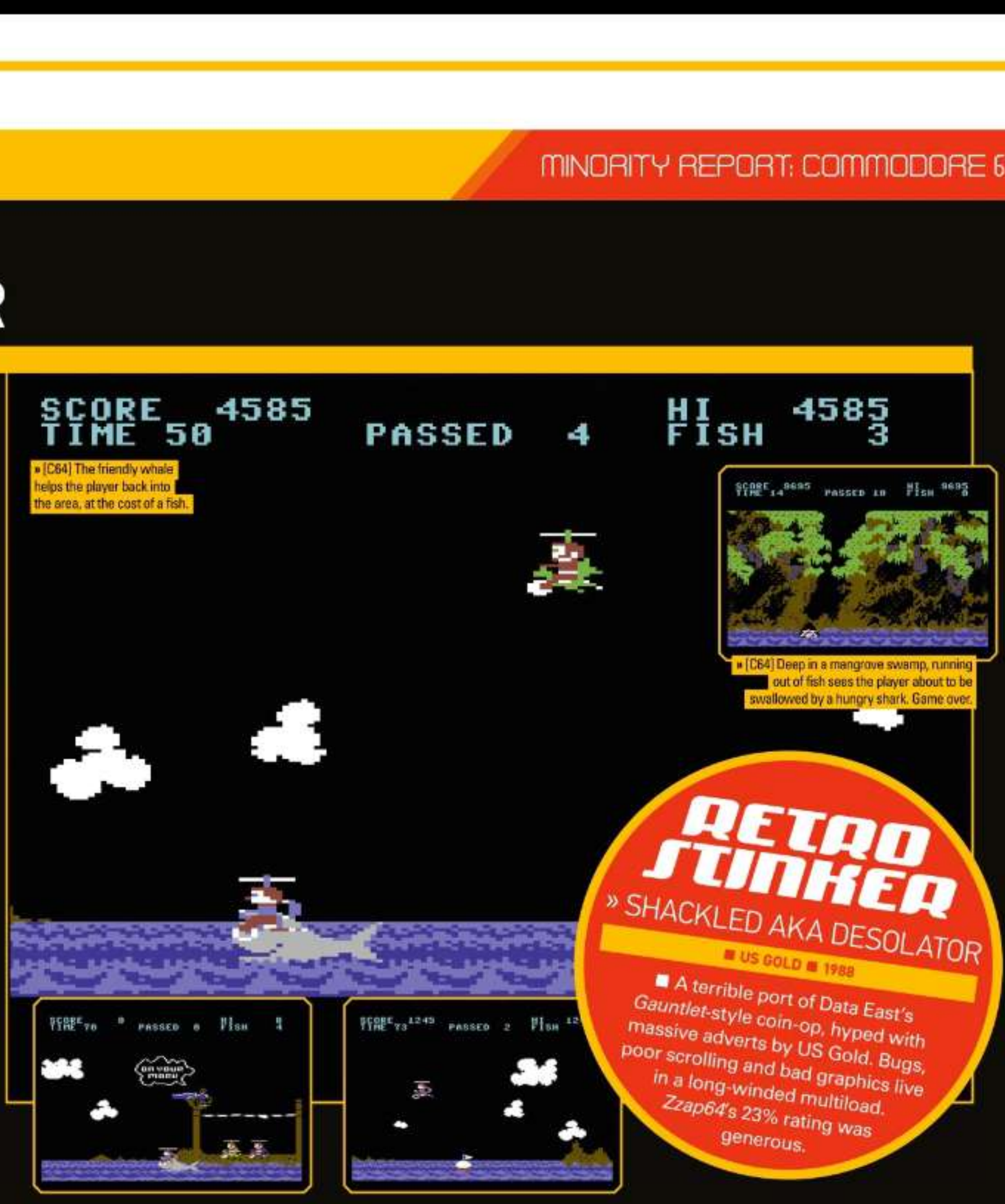
MANCOPTER

■ PUBLISHER: **DATASOFT** ■ YEAR: **1984**

■ **Imagine a cross between *Joust* and a race between human-powered gyrocopters.** *Mancopter* was developed by Datasoft in association with Nichibutsu USA; Scott Spanburg was the programmer, with cartoon graphics by Kelly Day and John A Fitzpatrick's music.

Unusually, this scrolls from right to left, the opposite to most horizontal scrollers. One or two players start on the back of a whale and press the fire button repeatedly to gain altitude. Pushing left accelerates and pushing right decelerates. Computer racers must be overtaken or avoided, and will try to knock the player out of the sky.

Much like *Balloon Fight* (released later in 1984), the chopper on top wins any collision. The player can wave a fish to call the whale back, helping them launch again. Run out of fish and it is a large shark that swims along instead. Pelicans also fly past; if they have a red gullet the player can grab a fish, while an empty one means the pelican will steal a fish (as will the leaping octopus in the mangrove swamps). Passing a buoy adds extra time to the clock, and reaching a checkpoint adds points for opponents passed and time remaining. Later levels see mermaids holding fish to grab, oil rigs and rafts to rest on, and clouds launching lightning bolts.



» [C64] The friendly whale helps the player back into the area, at the cost of a fish.

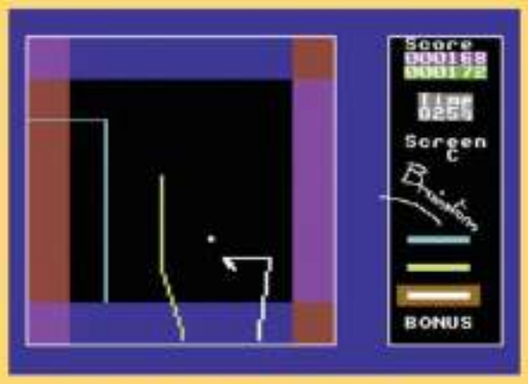
» [C64] Deep in a mangrove swamp, running out of fish sees the player about to be swallowed by a hungry shark. Game over.

RETRO STINKER

» SHACKLED AKA DESOLATOR

■ US GOLD ■ 1988

■ A terrible port of Data East's *Gauntlet*-style coin-op, hyped with massive adverts by US Gold. Bugs, poor scrolling and bad graphics live in a long-winded multiload. *Zzap64*'s 23% rating was generous.



» BRAINSTORM

■ DEVELOPER: **FIREBIRD**
■ YEAR: **1987**

■ David Kirby did the C64 conversion of Pete Cooke's ingenious budget puzzle game, later given away on a *C&VG* multiformat cover tape. Using the pointer to draw up to three lines, the moving ball must be trapped on red sections (that add points) and avoid pink areas. Be above the minimum points target when the timer ends to complete the stage. Three difficulty levels and a choice of starting level help make it fun.

» PI R SQUARED

■ DEVELOPER: **ARGUS PRESS SOFTWARE**
■ YEAR: **1987**

■ Here is another fun puzzle game, featuring music by Jason C Brooke. Help the scatter-brained professor reorganise his mind by collecting parts of a formula in the correct order from the maze of rotating wheels. Swapping cogs can only be done where they meet, the rotation affecting which way you can move. Bad guys whizz around draining your IQ, while power-ups include a calculator (move faster) and books (extra IQ).

» ARENA

■ DEVELOPER: **CULT GAMES**
■ YEAR: **1988**

■ This was inspired by Julian Gollop's Spectrum strategy game *Chaos* that never got an official C64 conversion, and is just as fun. Up to eight wizards (human or computer controlled) cast spells and summon creatures to fight on the scrolling battlefield. However, summoned creatures can be an illusion to confuse opponents. Spells have an alignment, range and chance of success, while castles hide the wizard from attack.

» HYPERBOWL

■ DEVELOPER: **MASTERTRONIC ADDED DIMENSION (MAD)**
■ YEAR: **1990**

■ This *Rocket League* ancestor has rotating vector ships and a David Whittaker title tune. Players must try to push or shoot the puck across the opponent's touchline or into the goal zone to score the most before time runs out. There are ten types of ship to choose; some have inertia or homing bullets, changing the tactics needed. It has a pretty fun multiplayer mode, too.

THE MAKING OF

SKIDMARKS AND SUPER SKIDMARKS

Cows on wheels! Minis! Caravans! Quadratic B-splines! Ridiculous eight-player modes across two screens! Praise be for all the wonderful things brought unto us by those goodly Antipodean souls at Acid Software. Did we mention the caravans?

WORDS BY LEWIS PACKWOOD

The name *Skidmarks* was probably unfortunate, in hindsight. No doubt thousands of bumfluff-chinned, Amiga-owning schoolboys across the UK got a good giggle out of the fact that this racer shares a name with embarrassing Y-front stains. But beneath the slightly rude-sounding title is an absolutely solid multiplayer racing game that was one of the best on the Amiga. And the sequel, *Super Skidmarks*, was even better.

The developer behind it all, Acid Software, was probably unfamiliar to most gamers at the time. This tiny software studio in New Zealand would go on to make the excellent top-down racer *Roadkill* and the phenomenal *Guardian*, which scooped the number three position in *Amiga Power*'s Ultimate All-Time Top 100. But in 1993, about the only major release Acid had to its name was the fairly mediocre platformer *Woody's World*. Then along came *Skidmarks* (stop laughing at the back).

Chris Blackbourn was the eager young coder behind this fancy racing game. "I was fresh out of high school and just starting university when I started working at Acid Software," recalls Chris, who went by the name 'Andrew' at the time, and is listed as such on the game's credits. "Everything was wild and exciting! Game dev back then was a lot like the indie scene is now, very experimental, everyone cribbing from everyone else, no one really sure how to get the results they wanted, and very, very passionate."

Chris says that *Skidmarks* started life as a simple demo for the Blitz Basic programming

Here's Chris Blackbourn working on *Epic Skidmarks* while sunning himself in Bali, Indonesia. Chris is now an independent developer, but worked at Lionhead, BioWare and Ubisoft after leaving Acid.

language. Blitz Basic was created by New Zealander Mark Sibly as a more user-friendly version of BASIC, and Mark would later use it (along with assembler code) to create *Gloom*, an early *Doom* clone that was released for the Amiga in 1995.

By the point that Chris joined Acid, the studio already had a couple of shoot-'em-ups under its belt (like the *Defender* clone *Zeron*), and was looking to diversify. "We were trying to round out the stable of shooters and side-scrollers with a racing game," he says, "and I was trying to show how you could use [Blitz Basic] to create a generic version inspired by one of my all-time favourite Commodore 64 games, *Racing Destruction Set*. The original plan was to bundle the annotated source code in the same box as Blitz. Very early on we made the decision to pivot: instead of making beautiful source code for a single-player car game, we decided to make an amazing multiplayer racing game that pushed the limits of what the hardware was capable of."

Skidmarks certainly did push the hardware, with incredibly smooth 3D animation on its dinky racing cars – a far cry from the blocky sprites seen in most Amiga games. Chris says that creating this smooth 3D effect was no easy task, and originally the team tried to achieve it using Lego, believe it or not. "On a different project, we had a rig made from Lego that consisted of a central axle and a little crank that was geared down 32 [times]. We'd mount an 'asteroid' (aka painted polystyrene) on the axle, and record an image using a digitiser. Turn the crank one revolution, take another image, and repeat 32 times. Then clean up lots of frames!"

Innovative as this technique was, it proved too unwieldy to use in the final game, notes Chris, chiefly because they needed to depict the cars at multiple different angles in mid-air. "For *Skidmarks*, we wanted 32 different rotations at five pitches and five rolls for a total of 800 frames. It was too much! We also didn't know how to pivot the car precisely enough. Out of desperation, we turned to a 3D ray-tracing package called Imagine, and once we made that decision, everything flowed from there."

The tracks were also beautifully designed in 3D, with all sorts of bumps, jumps and banks that would send the cars careening through the air. Yet strangely, these colourful 3D playgrounds came about through Chris' fascination with Colonial Marines. "A few years earlier, I was amazed by the terrain computer graphics for the landing sequence of the dropship in the movie *Aliens*," Chris remembers. "I had originally tried to do something similar in AmigaBASIC, but it never really worked out until we forced everything into an isometric viewpoint and rendered it offline with a paint over." Chris ended up applying a similar isometric technique in the game, so we can thank Hicks, Vasquez, Apone et al for the genesis of *Skidmarks*' superbly bouncy 3D tracks. Incidentally, if you're interested in seeing what the source code for this looks like, there's an extract on Chris's blog at bit.ly/2S24vw4. ▶

» [Amiga 1200] The 'quadratic B-splines' used to make the fancy-looking cars in *Skidmarks* became something of a running gag, even turning up on a box quote in the sequel.

» [Amiga 1200] Crossroads were a common feature on *Skidmarks* tracks, and caused absolute mayhem if you found yourself encountering back markers.

» [Amiga 1200] This circuit in *Super Skidmarks* gets a bit Monaco with its sharp bends.

Another clue to the way *Skidmarks* pushed the Amiga hardware was in the game's title: each car would leave trails in the dirt as it skidded around corners, which was a real novelty at the time. By the end of each race, the course would be crisscrossed with dirt trails, showing the favoured racing lines of the competitors, and really adding to the racing feel.

[Amiga CD32] *Super Skidmarks* feels more like banger racing at times, as cars pile into each other at corners. Luckily, the cars can't take damage.

"The cows would bounce so fast, they'd fly out of the boundary of the map and disappear off-screen. I toned it down just enough so that it was playable..."

CHRIS BLACKBOURN

ACID

***Skidmarks* was released in late 1993 and received positive reviews from critics.** *Amiga Format* awarded the game 90%, praising its beautiful ray-traced cars and great tracks, along with the game's addictive two-player split-screen mode and the ability to race with four players across two linked Amigas. *CU Amiga*, meanwhile, gave *Skidmarks* a glowing 92%, declaring it a "milestone in Amiga games" and "one of the most playable racers ever". *Amiga Power* was slightly more muted in its praise, however, lauding the intuitive controls, four-player mode and the sheer number of frames used for each car (which "results in a mild belief that they are in fact real"), but lamenting the game's tendency to crash at the end of a championship and to stop to access the disk at the end of a race, resulting in a final score of 78% (increased slightly to 80% for the Amiga 1200 version).

Chris and the folks at Acid quickly set to work on a sequel, *Super Skidmarks*, which would be released in 1995 and offered improvements across the board. For a start, the game came on a whopping seven disks with 24 tracks – double the number of the previous game – and all of them could be raced forwards or backwards to extend the track options further. And to avoid tedious disk swapping (not to mention issues with disk accessing), the game

EPIC SKIDMARKS

CARAVANS ARE RETURNING TO A SCREEN NEAR YOU

After stints at Lionhead, BioWare and Ubisoft, Chris Blackbourn is back in New Zealand, and he's returned to that amazing Amiga racing game he created all those years ago. "I've recovered all the original content, tracks, cars, sounds, music etc, and have been remastering it using modern techniques," he says.

Chris has been working on *Epic Skidmarks*, a brand-new online version of the game, since around 2016. The current main feature is a drop-in/drop-out multiplayer mode called 'Two Herds At War', where players join either the red herd or the yellow herd and attempt to raise their team's score by winning quick-fire races – or simply by blocking the other team's cars. But Chris says he's planning to expand the game to include more features as time goes on. And most importantly, the infamous caravans are present and correct.

The only downside for players in the UK is that because the servers are in the southern hemisphere, the lag is pretty terrible up north, Chris admits. "Maybe I should drop a server over there for a wee bit so you can play..."

Still, because it's a browser-based game, you can try it for free pretty much anywhere. "You can now play on mobile, desktop or even VR," says Chris. "There's even a possibility we may back-port to Amiga."

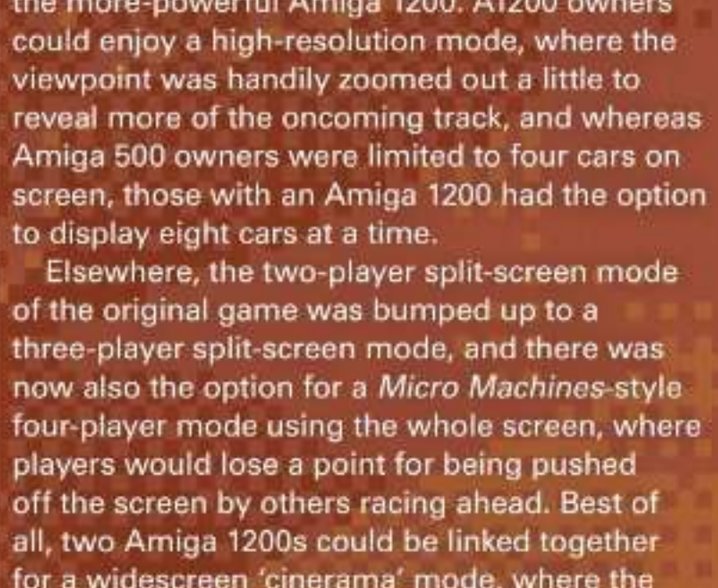
You can sample *Epic Skidmarks* for yourself at epicskidmarks.com, and follow the game on Twitter at @epicskidmarks.

could now be installed on a hard drive.

Best of all, *Super Skidmarks* had a much bigger range of fun and varied vehicles to choose from, including Minis, VW Beetles and, bizarrely, cows. Chris recalls that the cows were actually a stock 3D model that came with Imagine. "One of the artists put some wheels on," he says, "and then they were in the game. Cows in real life are fairly slow compared to racing cars, [but making them slow] just wasn't very fun. So I took the settings for the Formula 1 cars, copied them across and made them four times faster, which basically turned *Skidmarks* into pinball. The cows would bounce so fast, they'd fly out of the boundary of the map and disappear off-screen. I toned it down just enough so that it was playable..."

Another fun addition was the option to attach a caravan to your car. The caravans would bobble about behind your vehicle, dragging it this way and that, and leading to hilarious pileups as four caravan-towing players attempted to bundle through tight corners. It is to the game industry's great shame that caravans do not appear in racing games more often, and are instead consigned to this footnote in gaming history.

All in all, *Super Skidmarks* represents an attempt by Chris and the team to push the Amiga as far as it would go. "A lot of the features were basically dares to see what the hardware could do," says Chris. In particular, the game featured a bevy of options for owners of the more-powerful Amiga 1200. A1200 owners could enjoy a high-resolution mode, where the viewpoint was handily zoomed out a little to reveal more of the oncoming track, and whereas Amiga 500 owners were limited to four cars on screen, those with an Amiga 1200 had the option to display eight cars at a time.



» [Amiga 1200] The billboard next to the track declares 'GO' at the start of a race, and there are loads of lovely trackside details to enjoy.

Elsewhere, the two-player split-screen mode of the original game was bumped up to a three-player split-screen mode, and there was now also the option for a *Micro Machines*-style four-player mode using the whole screen, where players would lose a point for being pushed off the screen by others racing ahead. Best of all, two Amiga 1200s could be linked together for a widescreen 'cinerama' mode, where the whole track was displayed across two monitors, with a slight overlap in the middle. This meant it was possible to have eight-player races with the whole track visible at once, and all using just one copy of the game. "The eight-player limit was precisely because the hardware had eight sprites," recalls Chris, "and Simon [Armstrong, studio head] insisted that everything run at 50 frames per second, even though we had more than twice as much game logic."

Another nifty feature in *Super Skidmarks* was the *Pong*-style game that you could play on the menu screen, while the game was loading. "The *Pong* game was actually a lot of fun to develop," says Chris. "You can actually play single-player, or two-player, or play against yourself. I probably spent more time playtesting that version of *Pong* than I did writing it!" At roughly the same time, Namco employed a similar idea in the PlayStation version of *Ridge Racer*, where you could play a version of *Galaxian* ▶

» [Amiga 1200] The skidmarks you lay down over the course of a race tell the story of disastrous corners taken at ill-advised speeds.

CONVERSION CAPERS

THE VARIOUS VERSIONS OF SUPER SKIDMARKS

AMIGA 500/1200

The Amiga version of *Super Skidmarks* came on seven floppy disks, and it was compatible with both the Amiga 500 and Amiga 1200. But there were several improvements for the 1200, including a high-resolution mode, options for having eight cars on the track rather than four, and the amazing option to link two Amiga 1200s together to view the whole track across two screens.

AMIGA CD32

The CD32 version was practically identical to the Amiga 1200 one, with the big advantage that having everything on one CD eliminated the need for tiresome disk swapping. Linking systems together for the vaunted eight-player mode was tricky, however, unless you had a special adaptor. This version also came with a demo of *Guardian*, a movie of *Roadkill*, and a full version of *Defender*.

MEGA DRIVE

Codemasters took over publishing duties from Guildhall Leisure for the Mega Drive conversion, which featured one of its special J-Carts with two extra control ports for four-player split-screen games. The biggest change is the very different graphical style, and, bizarrely considering the game's name, the distinct lack of skidmarks. Other differences include the fact there are only six cars on the track, and only four vehicles are available initially, although others, like cows and F1 cars, can be unlocked.

while the game loaded. But, controversially, Namco patented this idea of an 'auxiliary game' on loading screens, a patent that only expired in 2015. "Wow, that certainly caused an uproar at the time!" says Chris. "There was a similar situation with a 'rumble' patent, and an entire generation of gamers had less-capable controllers because a few lawyers got greedy. It put a huge chilling effect on the whole industry."

The *Super Skidmarks* menu screen also offers up something of an oddity, as a slightly obscured banner seems to say '*Skidmarks 2*' rather than '*Super Skidmarks*'. And indeed, some reviews at the time called the game *Skidmarks 2*, or even *Super Skidmarks 2*. Chris explains the confusion: "At some point we announced we were working on *Skidmarks 2*. By the time we shipped, the official name and name on the box were the same: *Super Skidmarks*. I think part of the confusion arises because some of the in-game artwork and some of the documentation refers to the internal version number 'SKIDMARKS V2.2', which is actually the version string of the multiplayer protocol that has to match when you're playing over serial cable." In short, it's definitely called *Super Skidmarks*, despite what you may have read.

"It had that seemingly ridiculous mode where you could push two monitors side by side and play it across two linked Amigas and two screens"
CAM WINSTANLEY

***Super Skidmarks* got a rapturous reception from the gaming press in early 1995, receiving a score of 92% from both *CU Amiga* and *Amiga Format*, and 86% from *Amiga Power*, which was bumped up to 91% for the Amiga 1200 version.** Reviewer Cam Winstanley recalls the game became something of a favourite in the *Amiga Power* office: "Along with *Sensible Soccer*, *Dynablaster*, *Gravity Power* and *Stunt Car Racer*, *Super Skidmarks* had the rare distinction of being a game that everyone would stay in at lunchtime – or even after work – to play with the rest of the team. Unlike the others, it had that seemingly ridiculous mode where you could push two monitors side by side and play it across two linked Amigas and two screens. And how much of a non-commercial concept is that? We reckoned we must have been the only people in the country who had matching double monitors, allowing it to be played as it had been intended.

"So we'd all crowd round to play, and your eyes would track effortlessly from screen to screen, and it always seemed within the realms of possibility that even if you were behind, you could still pull some crazy shit on the final couple of laps and win. I'd been a huge fan of *Ivan 'Ironman' Stewart's Super Off Road* for years beforehand – a good multiplayer *Amiga Power* session on *Super Skidmarks* definitely hit all the same notes."

Super Skidmarks was also released a short while afterwards for the Amiga CD32. Reviews at the time pointed out that this version lacked the option to link two machines together, although Chris notes that it was possible to link a CD32 to an Amiga 1200 with a CD-ROM if you had a special adaptor. Nevertheless, the CD32 version made up for this perceived fault by bundling in a one-level demo of *Guardian*, a CGI *Roadkill* movie and a full version of *Defender* coded in Blitz Basic. And later in 1995, *Super Skidmarks* got a well-received Mega Drive conversion, which Chris recalls "has quite a different tone from the Amiga version and has more of a play-from-the-couch arcade feel".

The game also received an expansion in the form of the *Super Skidmarks Data Disks*, which provided a further 12 tracks as well as new difficulty and championship modes. And then in 1997, the definitive version was released: *Ultimate Super Skidmarks* for the CD32 and Amiga CD-ROM. In addition to an enhanced version of *Super Skidmarks*, this pack included *Super Silly Skidmarks* and *Super Skidmarks Farm Yard Edition*, which added tons of new and very silly vehicles, including baby walkers, monster trucks, buses, milk floats, tanks, footballs, skiers, toilets and UFOs.

Chris Blackbourn, meanwhile, went on to finish his degree in mathematics, then relocated to the UK to work with Peter Molyneux at Lionhead Studios, before heading to Canada for a job at BioWare, and later Ubisoft Montreal. Nowadays he's back in New Zealand as an independent developer mostly doing contract work – but his passion for *Skidmarks* (stop giggling) is undimmed, as you'll see elsewhere on these pages. ✱

WACKY RACERS

SUPER SKIDMARKS OFFERED EIGHT BEAUTIFULLY ANIMATED VEHICLES

MINI

The Mini is the car that *Super Skidmarks* starts you off with, a bit like in real life. No one has a Porsche as their first car, right? Unless you're a spoiled teenager in one of those beastly American reality TV shows.

PORSCHE

Actually, thinking about it, did Acid ask whether they could use the images and names of these cars? One would presume so, but maybe we should keep quiet just in case. Anyway, the Porsche is fairly nippy, as you'd expect.

VW

This is basically Herbie following some serious after-market mods. It's the kind of Beetle that the naughty kids would use to tear down a California beach in a low-budget Seventies Disney kids film.

MIDGET

Definitely not an MG Midget, instead this is some kind of buggy that looks like it was made in your dad's garage. Our embarrassing lack of car knowledge has come back to haunt us. We should have read more *Autocar* as a teen.

» [Mega Drive] The Mega Drive version of *Super Skidmarks* looked very different with its more vibrant colour scheme. Shame about the lack of skidmarks on the track, though.

» [Mega Drive] Codemasters took over publishing duties for the Mega Drive version of *Super Skidmarks*, and its logo is emblazoned across the tracks accordingly.

» [Mega Drive] Four players could race in split-screen on the Mega Drive, with the extra two controllers plugging in to the J-Cart the game shipped on.

» [Mega Drive] Some of the courses for *Super Skidmarks* were particularly twisty and complicated, meaning it was easy to start heading the wrong way.

CAMARO

Or watched *Top Gear*. Ugh, those presenters, though. Still, here we have a 'muscle' car with 'massive' 'wheels'. As you'd expect, it's excellently grippy with those 'Big Bertha' tyres, and bobbles about pleasingly over bumps.

TRUCK

Does anyone remember *Bertha*, by the way? That stop-motion animation about a factory machine that can make anything? 'Bertha, lovely Bertha, you are a lovely machine… something something… like a dream!' Great stuff.

F1 CAR

Any F1 team manager worth their salt would throw a fit if they saw the tracks their lovely cars were being driven around here. There's a reason why Grand Prix courses don't have moguls and jumps. Still, they seem to manage okay.

COW

MOO! Cows on wheels! And they're super fast! This is what it's all about. *Ultimate Super Skidmarks* would later double down on the silliness by introducing vehicles like UFOs, footballs and toilets. Yes, it was zany.

CLASSIC MOMENTS

Numan Athletics

» **PLATFORM:** ARCADE » **RELEASED:** 1993 » **DEVELOPER:** NAMCO

A seaside holiday is always a great opportunity to indulge your unwavering love of arcade games. There's a particular thrill that comes from walking through an unfamiliar arcade for the first time, taking in the games on offer – even if you know most of them, simply guessing what might be next can be a thrill. Then, just off to your left, you spot something that you've seen but never played. It's that weird superpowered sports game that was on *GamesMaster*. Curious, you insert a coin.

You're determined to see the thing you remember most vividly from the show, a contest where you grab a speeding train and push it back, but by the time you get there, the game's demanding goals mean that you're on your fifth credit. Your first attempt ends before it starts, as you mistime your button press and get run over by the train. Last chance, now. You brace, and the grab is successful! Furiously hammering the buttons, you put everything you can into your effort to see the next stage. As you push off, your fate has been sealed – but what will it be? ✱

BIO

This isn't a game about a future new wave pioneer's adventures in PE class, but an arcade multisports game in the tradition of *Track & Field*. By the Nineties, new games in the genre needed a hook to set them apart from their peers. With obvious ideas like military training already taken, Namco's *Numan Athletics* starred superpowered humans competing in absurd sports such as tower jumping, rock smashing and missile defence. The game was successful enough to receive a sequel titled *Mach Breakers*, but the only home port available was on the Wii Virtual Console service – and then only in Japan.

MORE NUMAN ATHLETICS MOMENTS

Supersonic Sprint

The first event you'll take on in *Numan Athletics* is easily the most familiar – a simple race. However, our competitors are no ordinary humans, so they cover an enormous distance in the typical time taken for a 100-metre sprint. In fact, they're travelling so fast that at one point, they even overtake a drag racer!

Wanton Destruction

Who needs a javelin when you're physically capable of hurling ballistic missiles hundreds of metres through the air? It's an amusing image, but we've never been able to work out the location the anomalous athletes have chosen for this game – why are they lobbing missiles at poor, innocent giraffes?

Super Best Friends

Why have superhumans even got time to compete in athletic events, when they should be saving the world from the tyranny of deep sea monsters, space aliens and Piers Morgan? This event provides the answer – the Numans are so effective that kaiju can be safely kept as mere fodder for their games.

Fall From Grace

Numan Athletics has some pretty funny failure animations, but one of the best is this one from the tower jumping event – if you make it above ground level and fall, you'll make a huge crater in the pavement below in spectacular fashion. It's a pretty easy scene to see, too, as this is one of the game's hardest events.

ULTIMATE GUIDE

Hard Drivin'

The Eighties was the 'arcade decade' and arriving at the end of that glorious era was one of the most forward-thinking and technically impressive driving games yet conceived. Retro Gamer takes Atari's Hard Drivin' for one more lap around the track!

Words by Martyn Carroll

SPEED
ST
TI

» *Hard Drivin'* – so real you apparently need to wear a helmet and a fireproof suit.

» Domark released versions for six home formats. An Acorn Archimedes version was announced but never released.

» [Arcade] Punters are watching and you plough straight into the cow on the first corner. The indignity!

CONVERSION CAPERS

ZX Spectrum

■ No one was expecting great things from the Spectrum version, but Mike Day managed to pull off a minor miracle to deliver a convincing version of the coin-op. The graphics may be monochrome, but the shading is excellent and the framerate leaves the other 8-bit versions standing.

Amstrad CPC

■ Oh dear. Besides a nice Mode 1 dashboard, this is a hasty port of the Spectrum version (the graphics and smaller screen size are dead giveaways). This wouldn't be such a bad thing, except it's slower and choppier than the Speccy version, which impacts on the gameplay.

Commodore 64

■ Oh dear, oh dear. This contender for worst C64 game ever released was apparently ported in just two weeks. We're surprised it took that long. It's slower than Freescape, the draw distance is about three foot, and there are no track junctions or action replays. The pits.

Atari ST

■ The ST was the lead platform for Domark's 16-bit versions and Jurgen Friedrich did a top job of adapting the arcade game. It's a little rough around the edges with a few graphical glitches (cars can often be seen 'through' the scenery), but overall this is a first-rate conversion.

Drivin'

Sometimes the title says it all. With *Hard Drivin'* Atari invited players to climb into the 'ultimate driving simulator' and 'put the pedal to the metal' – to *drive hard* basically. But players quickly discovered that *Hard Drivin'* meant something different. From the starting grid, you'd hit the accelerator and speed up the first hill, then hang a right to the signposted 'stunt track' – only for the car to slip off the road and collide with a cow idling beside a barn. As the now-famous cow issued a weary 'Mooooo' (the poor thing took a lot of hits), the true meaning of the title dawned on you: it was called *Hard Drivin'* because it was bloody hard!

This really was a driving simulator, and not just because the sit-down cab featured an ignition key, four-gear stick shift and force-feedback steering wheel. If you played *Hard Drivin'* like you played *RoadBlasters* – Atari's arcade racer from two years prior – then you'd spend a lot of time off-road, with the steering wheel spinning through your fingers and the words 'WRONG WAY!' flashing on-screen. Here, use of the brake – that funny foot pedal next to the accelerator that was ignored in other driving games – was mandatory. Furthermore, use of the gear shift, which required use of the clutch – a pedal that wasn't even present in other driving games – was recommended. Most players would opt for automatic transmission, believing that to be easier, but manual gears were great for controlling your speed – just like in a real car.

At odds to the realistic approach was the aforementioned stunt track. In contract to the speed track – a classic figure of eight comprising ▶

WHICH OF THE HOME VERSIONS CELEBRATED A PODIUM FINISH?

Amiga

■ A straight port of the ST version, as you'd expect. Like most pure polygon games it runs slightly slower, but you'd have a hard job telling. Much more noticeable are the sound effects, particularly the engine noise and screeching of tyres, which are superior on the Amiga.

PC

■ Having ported his code to the Amiga, Jurgen then took on the PC version. It includes support for various graphics modes and under EGA it's very similar to the ST version. The main difference is the audio which is typically awful. The engine noise sounds like a perturbed wasp.

Mega Drive

■ Arriving a year after the other conversions, you'd expect this console port to include some exclusive content, but it introduced nothing new. Technically it's on a par with the ST and Amiga versions. Controlling the game using a d-pad isn't ideal and takes some getting used to.

Lynx

■ The Lynx's screen was around seven times smaller than the coin-op's 25-inch monitor so this was always going to be a tough version – and so it proved. Visually it's faithful, but messy, and the controls are all over the place (a bit like your car). A worthy attempt but it falls short.

long sweeping corners – the stunt track was more like a kid's Hot Wheels track, with a bridge jump, a banked turn and a 360-degree vertical loop. While ridiculous, the dizzying loop was a huge talking point at the time, and it justified Atari's decision to jazz up what was originally conceived as a movie adaptation of *Driving Miss Daisy*. Okay, that's a fib, but it's true that the game did start life as a sedate driver-training simulator (see Rory Milne's Making Of feature in **Retro Gamer 133** for the full story).

This is why 3D polygons were used rather than sprites. The vehicles were properly modelled and the physics were precise, so the maths checked out and the driving experience felt as real as possible. The creation of a 3D environment resulted in side-benefits, such as the celebrated 'instant replay' feature which detailed your crashes from a removed, third-person viewpoint. Seeing your car getting flipped and smashed and bursting into flames following an error in judgement, while dramatic music played, was a highlight in every sense.

To move solid 3D polygons around with such speed required some serious muscle under the hood. The 'engine block' was three PCBs stacked on top of one another. The main board accommodated a 68010 CPU and three Texas Instruments graphics processors to handle rendering, geometry and physics. A supplementary board featured an Analog Devices DSP chip and was dedicated to graphics maths, and a sound board housed two further processors. If you've lost count, that's six processors in total. No wonder the cab retailed for a hefty $8,000 (as a comparison, a sit-down *RoadBlasters* coin-op sold for $3,500).

» [Arcade] According to the developers, the crawbridge jump was inspired by the opening scene of *The Blues Brothers* movie.

Hard Drivin' debuted in February 1989 and set the gaming press abuzz. While new coin-ops typically received a few column inches, this one earned in-depth reviews in several mags. *C&VG* called it "more than just a game", while *Sinclair User* awarded it 9/10 in a two-page review overflowing with superlatives: "*Hard Drivin'* is astonishing in terms of realism and sheer technical achievement… there are serious numbers of polygons, yet the speed of the thing is still astonishing… this is the one everybody is going to be playing this spring, assuming Atari can make enough to satisfy the astonishing demand." Astonishing? You can say that again.

One general criticism was the cost to play, which was £1 in the UK, at a time when most games were still 20p or 30p a go. This was a revolutionary arcade game, but if your brief time behind the wheel involved skidding around like Bambi on ice, then perhaps it wasn't worth the money. *Your Sinclair*'s Ciaran Brennan believed that the game's accuracy was actually a drawback: "Those of you who already drive will have access to the real thing, while the rest of you are going to spend a fortune brushing up on your skills." In the same review, he gave the game a convertibility factor of 4/10. This was a measure of how suitable a game would be for 'Spectrumisation', and at the time few people would argue with that score. The Freescape games showed that the Spectrum could do 3D polygons, but surely they couldn't be done in a fast driving game? ▶

» [Arcade] A head-on crash at almost 120mph? That will take some buffing out.

» [Arcade] You swerve to avoid that damned red truck… only to fly off the overpass. At least the novel instant replay feature takes the sting out of crashing.

» [Arcade] Although fairly underwhelming these days, everyone remembers the first time they braved the loop.

GET IN GEAR

HOW TO HANDLE SOME OF THE TRICKIEST SECTIONS OF THE TRACK (ALL SPEEDS ARE IN MPH)

#1 S-Bend

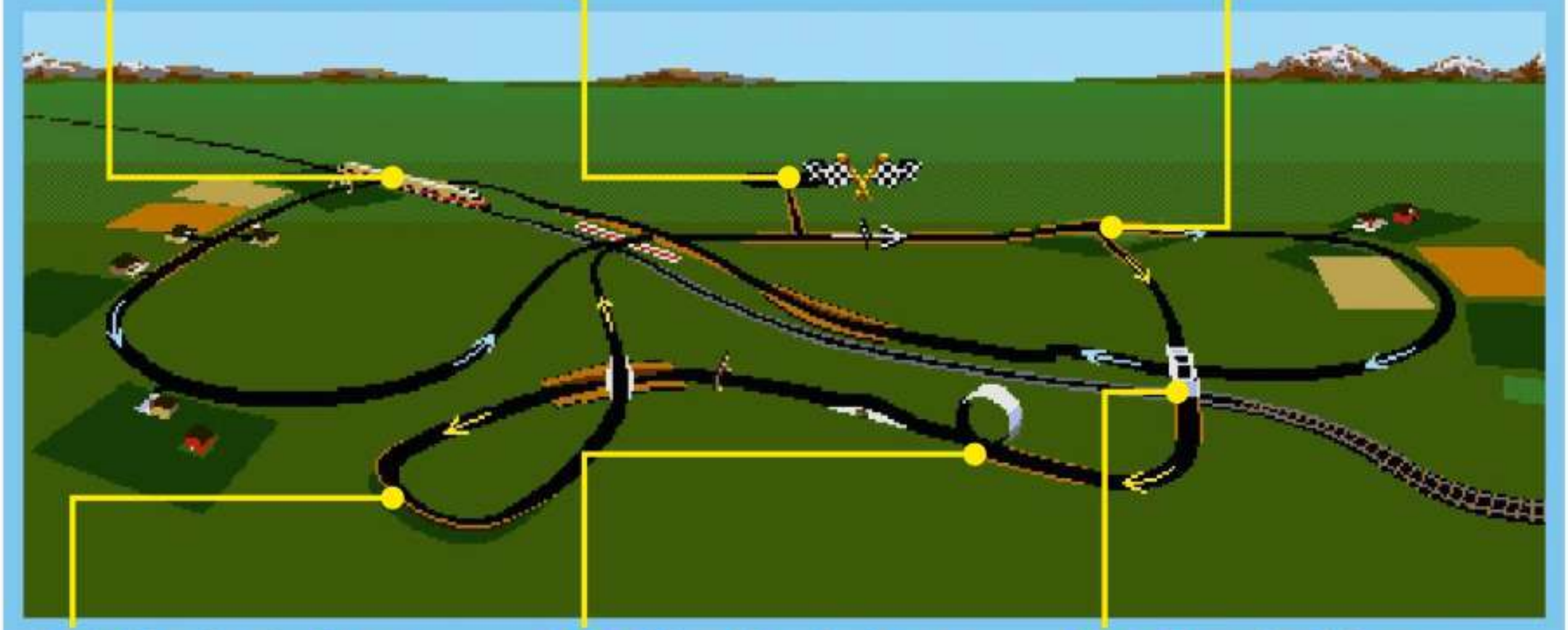
This is the toughest part of the speed track. Having crossed the bridge by the train, there's a small right-hander leading into a long left. You'll need to drop to 90, otherwise you'll drift off and miss the checkpoint gate. Once through, speed towards the finish line.

#2 Skidpan

This section of track was presumably used for testing during development but was left in the game. From the start line, turn 90 degrees to the left and you'll access a straight road which leads to a skidpan. There's not much to do here 'cept get your drift on.

#3 Track Split

Aim to hit 90 by the top of the hill, then if you're taking the stunt track, drop to 60 for the cow corner (if you're going for a fast lap, note that you can really cut this corner without getting penalised). Stay at 60 over the drop, then speed towards the drawbridge.



#6 Banked Turn

This corner is signposted 40, which is massively conservative. It's possible to take it almost flat-out at 120 or more in fourth gear without flipping out. The main thing to worry about is oncoming traffic. Try to stay in the middle of the road, and dart to the side if you have to.

#5 Vertical Loop

The stunt track's famous loop-de-loop. The sign says '60 min', but it's best to stay at around 60 – any faster and you may flip out of the loop. Try to stay on your side of the road, too. Beyond the loop is a bridge which is signposted 60, but you'll want to stay at 40 max.

#4 Drawbridge

The signpost advises 60, but you can make the jump at 80 or even 90 without crashing on landing. Note, however, that there's a sharp right-hander just past the jump which you'll want to take at 40 to 50 (if you're using manual gears, drop to second for this corner).

"I showed a demo of a large rotating polygon to my project manager. Not being versed in real-time rendering, he was furious that I had achieved apparently so little"

MIKE DAY

Q&A: MIKE DAY

WE CHAT TO THE MAN WHO CODED THE SPECTRUM VERSION OF HARD DRIVIN' FOR DOMARK

Did you receive any assets or assistance from Atari to help you with the conversion?
There wasn't much in the way of additional help. Binary Design gave me a couple of odds and ends, including a map of the track sketched by hand, and a graphics file of the mountains on the horizon which was essentially unusable. There was also a floppy disk with a few of the 3D assets, although it seemed incomplete. Essentially, the coin-op we had on loan became my reference, and I played it endlessly. Purely for research purposes, you understand.

What was your opinion of the coin-op?
I was super impressed. The resolution, framerate, scene complexity and number of polygons all combined to make an immersive experience which epitomised the direction I thought real-time 3D graphics ought to be heading. The driving experience was satisfying, rich and nuanced in ways which other driving sims couldn't come close to matching. It felt very much like driving a real car.

How did you approach the task of recreating such an advanced game on the Spectrum?
I was still in the process of learning how to make real-time engines, but I already knew that the whole thing had to be built on the ability to fill in the pixels of a convex polygon as fast as possible. So the first routine I coded was a scanline polygon filling algorithm which took a series of 2D screen points ordered clockwise, and I spent time making it as fast as I could. But a polygon in the game might be partly off the screen, so next I needed a clipping routine to trim it down to just the visible part. When I had reached this point, I showed a demo of a large rotating polygon to my project manager. Not being versed in real-time rendering, he was furious that I had achieved apparently so little. Where were the cars? The track?

So how long did it take to build everything else?
I think the whole thing was in development for five months. This included a final period of two or three weeks where I moved from Manchester to London to finish up the game in Domark's Putney Bridge office, and then a final all-nighter at the tape duplicating facility where the Domark project manager helped me add some beeps and squeaks. When we wrapped up that night, all I wanted to do was go home and sleep, but his car ran out of petrol on the way home!

You must have been pleased with how well your version was received?
I was pleased, yes. [...] Certainly there were aspects I would have changed. On balance, though, developing it was thoroughly fulfilling and I look back on it with a great deal of nostalgia.

» [ZX Spectrum] The famous loop is instantly recognisable in the Speccy version.

» [ZX Spectrum] The instant replay feature was carried over from the coin-op.

DRIVE HARDER

THE SEQUELS THAT FOLLOWED IN HARD DRIVIN'S SLIPSTREAM

» [Amiga] *Hard Drivin' II*'s track editor is a welcome, if clunky, addition to the mix.

» [Arcade] *Race Drivin*'s super stunt track was twice as long as the original courses, taking around three minutes to lap.

After 18 months in pole position, *Hard Drivin'* was finally overtaken by Atari's own *Race Drivin'*. The 1990 follow-up effectively superseded the original as it included the speed and stunt tracks, and added two new tracks: autocross and super stunt. The former was a forgettable loop, but the latter was a crowd-pleasing rollercoaster-style circuit that featured some wild obstacles. It also featured four cars to choose from, head-to-head racing and some upgraded tech that improved handling and reduced lag.

Not long after *Race Drivin'* debuted in arcades, Domark published a follow-up to its home conversions. The best thing about *Hard Drivin' II*, besides its subtitle (*Drive Harder*), was the inclusion of a track editor which allowed you to create your own courses or tweak the four that are included on the disk.

Back in the arcades, two further follow-ups were developed. *Street Drivin'* was an incremental update that included all the tracks from *Race Drivin'*, plus the stock car track that was previously exclusive to the multiscreen *Race Drivin' Panorama*. More adventurous (read: bonkers) was *Hard Drivin's Airborne* which equipped the cars with wings! Picture this: you could drive up the mountain road on the super stunt track, but instead of following the road around the mountain, you could whip out your wings and fly over it. Inevitably, both *Street* and *Airborne* were field-tested but never put into production.

That wasn't the end of the road, however. 1996 saw the release of *Race Drivin' A Go! Go!*, a Japanese PlayStation exclusive that featured an enhanced version of *Race Drivin'*, plus new tracks and oddness aplenty.

[Arcade] If you manage to beat the challenge time you get to take on the Phantom Photon in a grudge match.

[Arcade] If you defeat Mr Phantom your winning lap becomes the one future players compete against.

"Essentially, the coin-op we had on loan became my reference and I played it endlessly. Purely for research purposes, you understand"
MIKE DAY

It was a surprise, then, when Domark's Spectrum version turned out to be a rather good approximation of the coin-op. Developed by Mike Day at Binary Design, it received strong reviews across the board, including a 92% 'Smash' from *Crash*. Similarly, the Atari ST version coded by Jurgen Friedrich was an impressive conversion job. Jurgen had previously converted Atari's vector *Star Wars* games to multiple systems so he was clearly the right man for the job. The ST and other 16-bit versions also benefited from mouse support – controlling the game with a keyboard or joystick was tricky and using a mouse felt far more natural. The lack of analogue controls also hobbled the later versions for the Sega Mega Drive and Atari Lynx.

The game received two separate follow-ups in the early Nineties. At home, Domark cashed in with *Hard Drivin' II*, a standalone expansion for the PC, ST and Amiga, while in the arcades Atari rolled out *Race Drivin'* (see the 'Drive Harder' boxout for more information, including details of the unreleased arcade sequels). *Race Drivin'* included the speed and stunt tracks from the original, so you can play those on the many formats that received the sequel (including the SNES and Game Boy, which didn't get *Hard Drivin'*).

These days the easiest way to revisit *Hard Drivin'* is via *Midway Arcade Treasures 2* on Xbox, GameCube or PC (it's also available for the PS2 but the game suffers from some odd emulation issues). This 2004 collection features 20 titles including *Hard Drivin'* and several other Atari games from the period when it was still an arcade force to be reckoned with. ★

[Arcade] The Championship Lap is a gruelling head-to-head race around the stunt track. One small slip and it's over.

[NES] A version for the NES was canned before it was completed. The prototype code has since surfaced online.

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RETROREVIVAL

Formula 1

"UNLESS I'M VERY MUCH MISTAKEN... I *AM* VERY MUCH MISTAKEN!"

» PLAYSTATION » 1996 » BIZARRE CREATIONS

It's not a game that tends to be brought up in lists of the greatest PlayStation games these days, but I'll never forget the first time I clapped eyes on *Formula 1*. The real sport was incredibly exciting in the latter half of the Nineties, thanks to the likes of Damon Hill, Jacques Villeneuve, Mika Hakkinen and David Coulthard – and, of course, Michael Schumacher, whose undeniable skill and occasionally unsavoury tactics made him an excellent villainous figure. It wasn't hard to get sucked in, and I spent many a Sunday afternoon watching races.

I'd love to tell you that I was bowled over by the game's superb handling and the convincing AI of CPU-controlled racers, but I was a shallow child, so what really drew me in was the presentation. I'd enjoyed a few F1 games on my Mega Drive, including *Super Monaco GP*, Domark's *F1* and *Virtua Racing*, but none of them really looked like a televised race. Bizarre Creations' game did. Every detail on the track seemed to be perfect, from the cars' paint jobs to the advertising banners – but beyond that, it had the proper TV-style presentation, with the proper official timing displays and even the eternally excitable Murray Walker providing commentary. It was the perfect display of the PlayStation's power.

It was also a game that I would pine after for a long time, because there was no way we could afford a PlayStation in 1996. Worse yet, none of my friends had it, so I typically had to make do with playing the small slice of the game allowed by *Demo 1*. When I did finally get a PlayStation in 1998, *Formula 1* was one of the games I got with it. Even as I booted the game up and Joe Satriani's *Back To Shalla-Bal* kicked in on the menu screen, I could scarcely believe it was mine. As far as I was concerned, the future of gaming was in my hands. *Gran Turismo* overtook *Formula 1* as my driver of choice the next summer, but I'll always remember the racer that sold me on Sony's console to begin with. ★

T

Timing

THE MAKING OF ROBOCOP™ VERSUS THE TERMINATOR™

The early Nineties was a bountiful time for not just videogames, but also the burgeoning comic industry. Retro Gamer takes a look back at 1993 and a game that successfully combined the hyperactive enthusiasm and popularity of both industries

WORDS BY GRAEME MASON

IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** VIRGIN GAMES
- **» DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **» RELEASED:** 1993
- **» PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE, VARIOUS
- **» GENRE:** RUN-AND-GUN

After notching one film apiece, *The Terminator* and *RoboCop* stood equal. Both had been incredible sleeper hits, totally unfancied at the box office, and demonstrated the pointedly adult sci-fi talents of maverick directors looking for their first major breakthrough hit. Then, when the inevitable sequels appeared, the two franchises began to diverge: 1991's *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* eclipsed even its predecessor and broke box office records worldwide, while *RoboCop 2*, released a year earlier, was very far from the success that the first film had been, both critically and commercially. Bafflingly, a further *Terminator* film then appeared elusive, while *RoboCop* received a third, even more poorly received, outing in 1993 that made the heinous mistake of going ahead without its original star, Peter Weller. Nevertheless, thanks mainly to the UK's Ocean Software, there was already a rich vein of RoboCop-starring videogames at this point, however the pixellated Terminator was lagging behind. It was time for a dramatic merging of these two violent worlds.

The story of *RoboCop Versus The Terminator* began as a Dark Horse Comics four-part comic book from 1992. Created by the legendary pairing of writer Frank Miller and artist Walter Simonson, the brief series involves a labyrinthine time-twisting plot, drawing officer Alex Murphy into the complex and grim realm of the Terminators and the resistance fighters who are bravely trying to end their reign of terror. Securing the licence for a videogame based loosely on the comics, Virgin Games began developing *RoboCop Versus The Terminator* alongside another famous IP, *Aladdin*. Working beside lead designer and coder John Botti was Tim Williams, and he explains how he came to work on the violent crossover. "I had got a job [at Virgin] testing games, and shortly after that, they moved me into their new design department, probably because I would always make loads of suggestions on the bug reports." Tim coworked on level design for *Spot Goes To Hollywood* and *The Terminator* on the Mega-CD before finally getting his own gig. "At the time I seem to remember there were more high-profile games at Virgin, like *Aladdin*, so there was a feeling that *RVT* was the ugly stepchild when I joined the team. But I was absolutely thrilled to get my own game to design for."

With the licence secured, but unable to use material from the comics, including its direct plot, Tim, John and Noah Tool designed its levels, tone and background. "We couldn't use any Dark Horse content," remembers John. "So Tim and I would sit up at night analysing *Contra III: The Alien Wars*, one of our favourite games. We wanted to figure out what it was that made the game so addictive." The two concluded that the "vectored bullet", the slab of fire that introduces positional feedback into the game, was the key element, and it was duly incorporated as *RVT*'s core game mechanic. "Within one week, people at Virgin were noticing the game and even getting hooked. It all happens in those late nights, when people are sitting around with no distractions!"

John Botti grew up in Long Island, New York, an athletic student with a penchant for latent nerdism. "I discovered the Scott Adams adventure games, and they captured my imagination. One day I thought, 'I could make my own adventure ▶

"There was a feeling that RVT was the ugly stepchild at the time when I joined the team"
TIM WILLIAMS

CONVERSION CAPERS

WHAT VERSIONS SHOULD HAVE BEEN TERMINATED?

MEGA DRIVE
The original and best, developed in-house at Virgin Games. Fierce, loud and violent, it was a game with no rival on the 16-bit console, its oversized sprites, prone to exploding in a mass of crimson, are a thing of beauty even over 25 years later. It's still wickedly fun to play as well.

SNES
Apart from the predictable lack of blood, SNES *RoboCop Versus The Terminator* – developed across the road from Virgin at Interplay – is similar to the Mega Drive game, and it even includes a neat first-person shooting section as RoboCop approaches the Terminator base.

MASTER SYSTEM
Another port well worth checking out, which manages to replicate most of the run-down feel of the original. Detailed backgrounds, large sprites and simple controls all add up to an above-average scrolling run-and-gun game that could actually do with being a little tougher to play.

GAME GEAR
While visually striking, this portable adaptation suffers from extreme slowdown. There's also some disappointing graphical glitching on occasion. Yet overall, this is a pretty good effort, and a neat variation from the Sega handheld's usual range of software.

GAME BOY
The most disappointing conversion. RoboCop looks like he's been on crash diet, and moves arthritically around each level. And while the resemblance to the 8-bit classic by Ocean is not entirely unwelcome, RoboCop taking damage from big spiders is definitely not a good look.

DROP IT!

HOW CYBORG POLICEMAN VS RELENTLESS ANDROID FAILED TO MATERIALISE ON THE NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM

With the Mega Drive and Super Nintendo firmly in power by 1993, it's somewhat surprising that versions of *RoboCop Versus The Terminator* were even mooted in the first place on the previous generation of games consoles. Yet not only were these ports proposed, some were actually produced, and, in the case of the Master System, are a decent attempt at recreating the grungy feel of the original Mega Drive game. Over at Interplay, developer of the SNES game, shared assets from the Sega team at Virgin ensured that there was a continuous 'feel' to the game, and even an extra first-person sequence set in a dystopian future infested with Terminators. But with the NES version, things fell apart, as the developers struggled to impress the spirit of the game onto the creaking Nintendo console. Small indistinct and unimpressive graphics litter each level, and there's a notable lack of the brutal and muscular sound that's such a highlight of the other games. In all fairness, it's not a terrible game, but you can see why Virgin decided not to publish it: the format was waning, and *RoboCop Versus The Terminator* resembled more the – admittedly excellent – Ocean Software games from five years earlier rather than the fantastic Mega Drive title of 1993.

▶ game.'" Successfully founding his own business programming company at the tender age of 13, John subsequently enrolled in MIT, learning about computers, filmmaking, writing and more at the famous university. Graduating four years later, he moved to east LA, flat broke and exposed to one of the less salubrious parts of the city. "Six out of seven nights per week, every summer, there was a shooting outside my building," he notes sadly. "It propelled me out of LA and down to Orange County, where I eventually got a job at Virgin Games. They brought me in to *RVT* after they'd bought the licence for $2 million. When I got to Virgin, no one else was on the project – I was it!" In order to save both time and money, *RoboCop Versus The Terminator* utilised Dave Perry's Mega Drive engine, most recently seen in *Cool Spot* and *Global Gladiators*. "I had my own tools from previous projects," continues John, "but Dave's engine was clean, and it had been used on other Genesis games. I enhanced it, making a linked-list sprite object that allowed these huge monster bosses at the end of some levels."

In *RoboCop Versus The Terminator*, the player takes on the role of the eponymous armoured law enforcement officer. The devious Cyberdyne Systems, having won a contract to develop the Skynet defence system for the government, decides that RoboCop's neural networks, the only successful melding of human mind and computer to date, is the best template for its deadly new construct. In the future, both humans and Terminators realise the importance of RoboCop, but the giant chrome policeman has ideas of his own. Planning to infiltrate OCP's computer and transport himself into the future to eliminate Skynet, RoboCop must first make his way through the streets of Detroit against a deadly army of thugs and Terminators, now more than aware of what he's up to.

Perhaps in a reaction to the family fare that was being developed elsewhere at Virgin, *RVT*'s designers upped the gore and violence to levels rarely seen on Sega's Mega Drive. "We were all like 22 years old," laughs John. "And we wanted as much gore and blood as possible! Tim and I even installed switches in the game, so when the management came by, the game wouldn't look so violent." Tim credits artist Bob Stevenson with the large, shiny and detailed graphics that lend the game its unique look. "The whole project got a boost when Bob arrived and went to work recreating the old RoboCop that was in there. It looked so much better, and generated a lot of excitement. With the blood and gore, we did feel we were being a bit naughty including it – but around this time *Mortal Kombat* was coming out, so we thought we'd add a slightly tongue-in-cheek version." This over-the-top approach inspired a plethora of memorable imagery: exploding Terminators, spinning handguns and blood-stained windows were just some of the things that faced RoboCop on every level, a far cry from the game's condition when Tim first began work. "When I started, one of the biggest issues in the game was that it was just average to play. You'd walk, fire, walk… and that was about it. One of the big factors that changed this around was looking at the arcade games out there and learning from them. How did the projectiles move? What were the speed of things? RoboCop could jump and duck, so we created projectiles that forced him to constantly do this, and we'd time it so that the player, with skill, could master the sequencing of shots." Tim's overarching ethos was to create levels where a skilled player could get through without being hit. "I always wanted the player to know that if they got hit, it was their own fault, and with some practice, they could do better." To give greater variation, some levels include further requirements such as rescuing hostages or destroying security cameras, with familiar scenes

» [Mega Drive] Wait a minute, this is the future… where are all the phaser guns?

» [Mega Drive] Some missions involve rescuing hostages.

» [Mega Drive] There will be blood. Lots of blood.

» [Mega Drive] Fortunately, this version of RoboCop is a nimble fellow.

"We were all like 22 years old, and we wanted as much gore and blood as possible"
JOHN BOTTI

» [Mega Drive] Coder John Botti cunningly hid himself within the Mega Drive game.

» [Mega Drive] 'YOU'RE TERMINATED!'

from the movies as the backdrop. From the thug-heavy streets of Detroit to a toxic waste dump, OCP offices and the hostile future, there's plenty for fans of both movies to recognise and enjoy.

Furthermore, the overblown theme of *RoboCop Versus The Terminator* was perfectly encapsulated with RoboCop's arsenal, of which his own sizeable pistol is relegated to minor status. "It was important to have weapons that really did do different things," notes Tim, "and also ones you would be thankful to receive in certain areas." RoboCop can carry two guns at a time; if he picks one up, it replaces the one not currently wielded. With John Botti taking inspiration from *Contra III*, each weapon would be designed by him before Bob Stevenson and Tim honed their appearance. From the fun directional manipulation of the grenade launcher and blazing flamethrower, to the powerful bazooka, and a very useful homing missile gun, managing RoboCop's weaponry is the key to success. And for fans of the movie, there's nothing finer than picking up the massive Gatling gun from a stricken ED-209, which emits short high-powered bursts of fire, complete with an authentic 'budda-budda-budda' sound. With its violent gameplay that encouraged exploration in order to discover valuable secrets, the guns of *RVT* were a critical element for the team.

And compared to similar projects at Virgin, *RoboCop Versus The Terminator* employed a small squad of employees. "It was one of the best teams I've worked with, even though there were really just four of us – me, Tim, Bob and Noah," remembers John. An unofficial fifth member of the team came from an unexpected direction. "Every day, after the janitor was done, he would stop by my office at 11 or 12 midnight to see the latest cool things we'd put in the game," smiles John. "One night in particular, I was showing him how RoboCop could catch on fire, a cool little gag. The problem was design – how do you put him out?" The onlooking custodian offered an equally cool solution. "He suggested that if you shot the sprinkler systems it would rain water down on RoboCop, and put the fire out, essentially saving his life. We also had fire hydrants that did the same thing, creating this urgent game-within-a-game, trying to find a way of putting the fire on RoboCop out."

With Tommy Tallarico helping to construct the game's robust sound design ("It's just phenomenal – I don't think I've ever heard another game like it," gushes Tim), its designers laid out each stage, complete with multiple levels, improbable zipwires for RoboCop to traverse and a host of absurdly unrestrained gameplay. Development was swift, starting with John's exploration of the bespoke engine in August of 1992, through to release in the winter of 1993, and the reception was generally positive, with critics appreciating the tongue-in-cheek nature of the game. Likened to an arcade game, *RoboCop Versus The Terminator*'s style separates it from its peers and secured Virgin a hit away from its family-friendly fare such as *Cool Spot* and *Aladdin*. "It was a really fun time in my life," recalls John. "We were all young, and single and focused with no families, and it was a magical time where games programmer and designers ran the team. But you were also fully accountable for the success or failure of your game – if it sucked it was your fault!" While Tim has some reservations about the gameplay – most notably the extremely high hit point count of the final boss – overall, he echoes John's positive sentiments. "All around the office there was a good feeling, as if we'd managed to pull a rabbit out of the hat, and making a game that was really fun to play." And over 25 years later, **Retro Gamer** can attest that fun factor is still there. Excellent!

Martyn Carroll

What cherished games would you take to the island?

To mark 200 issues since the first Desert Island Disks feature appeared in these pages, we maroon the launch editor of Retro Gamer and discover the games he couldn't live without

Words by Paul Drury

Island Life

Our first Desert Island Disks castaway was Scott Adams back in **RG5**, back when our current castaway Martyn was the commissioning editor. Since then we have marooned another 72 programmers, artists, musicians, journalists and even the occasional comedian and rockstar on our digital island. Classic coin-ops are the most popular choices, with *Robotron* being picked most often and *Defender*, *Asteroids* and *Space Invaders* all making the top five with only *Tetris* representing consoles at number two. And we haven't forgotten our current editor Darran – we plan to maroon him next year.

What exactly does a manager look for when deciding who should launch a new mag dedicated to old videogames? A proven track record in magazine publishing? An impressive CV of editorship roles, perhaps?

"While everyone at Live Publishing spent their lunchtimes playing *Quake III* over the office LAN, I was sitting in the corner playing *Chuck Norris Superkicks*," admits Martyn Carroll. "My boss, Wayne Williams, had mooted the idea of a dedicated retro gaming mag in 2003, after seeing the Retro section in *Games™*, and in me he knew he had someone with an interest in the subject matter."

It proved a sound choice. Martyn had joined Live as a staff writer in 2000, a small company mainly producing PC tutorial-style magazines, and it was looking to expand its portfolio into gaming publications. He had written several articles on horror games for movie magazine *The Dark Side* and so the chance to edit the first UK mag focused solely on old games must have been incredibly exciting.

"The whole 18 months I was in charge of **Retro Gamer** was terrifying," he corrects us. "I did the first issue with no real resources, as we didn't know whether it would take off. And then when it did take off, and it went from being a quarterly to a bimonthly to a monthly, it was a case of always trying to improve it, to reward those people who'd bought into it despite those early issues being pretty ropey. At the time it felt like a struggle I'd never win, so a part of me was relieved when Live Publishing collapsed in 2005. I've made it sound completely awful, haven't I?"

Thankfully, **Retro Gamer** was saved from the ashes by Imagine Publishing and rose, phoenix-like, under the stewardship of our current editor Darran Jones, who has continued in his role when Future PLC took over in 2016. Martyn stills regularly contributes articles as a freelancer, as well as occasionally writing for *Eurogamer*, *Micro Mart* and the Retro Fusion books. "I've always prioritised **Retro Gamer**, though," he smiles. "In the first issue I wrote that there was enough content for 100 issues and people thought I was nuts. I never imagined it would actually make that milestone, yet here we are, more than 200 issues down the line. Darran and the team have done a fine job, curating the content and making sure it's still a must-read for many people. To say I'm proud to be part of it is an understatement." *

"In the first issue of Retro Gamer I wrote that there was enough content for 100 issues and people thought I was nuts"

Martyn Carroll

Marty's Desert Island Disks

The games that Martyn simply couldn't live without

01 Jetpac (ZX SPECTRUM)
I had a 16K ZX Spectrum so the first four Ultimate games were on constant rotation, and this was my favourite. I remember being gutted that I couldn't play *Lunar Jetman* – it being a 48K game – but when I later upgraded and did get it, I realised that the original game was so brilliantly simple that it couldn't be bettered.

02 Jet Set Willy II (ZX SPECTRUM)
Jet Set Willy had a huge impact on me, but I would pack the follow-up because it's basically Matthew Smith's masterpiece plus loads of extra rooms – and some of them are pretty clever. Plus, I've never completed it, so I'd happily while away the days doing that.

03 HERO (COMMODORE 64)
My best mate Rob had a Commodore 64 with a ton of games, but this oldie was the one we kept returning to. I love how each deeper cavern adds a new danger or obstacle, and I never tire of it. I've since played every version, and while I admire the Atari 2600 original, the lure of the C64 version and the memories it evokes means I'd choose that.

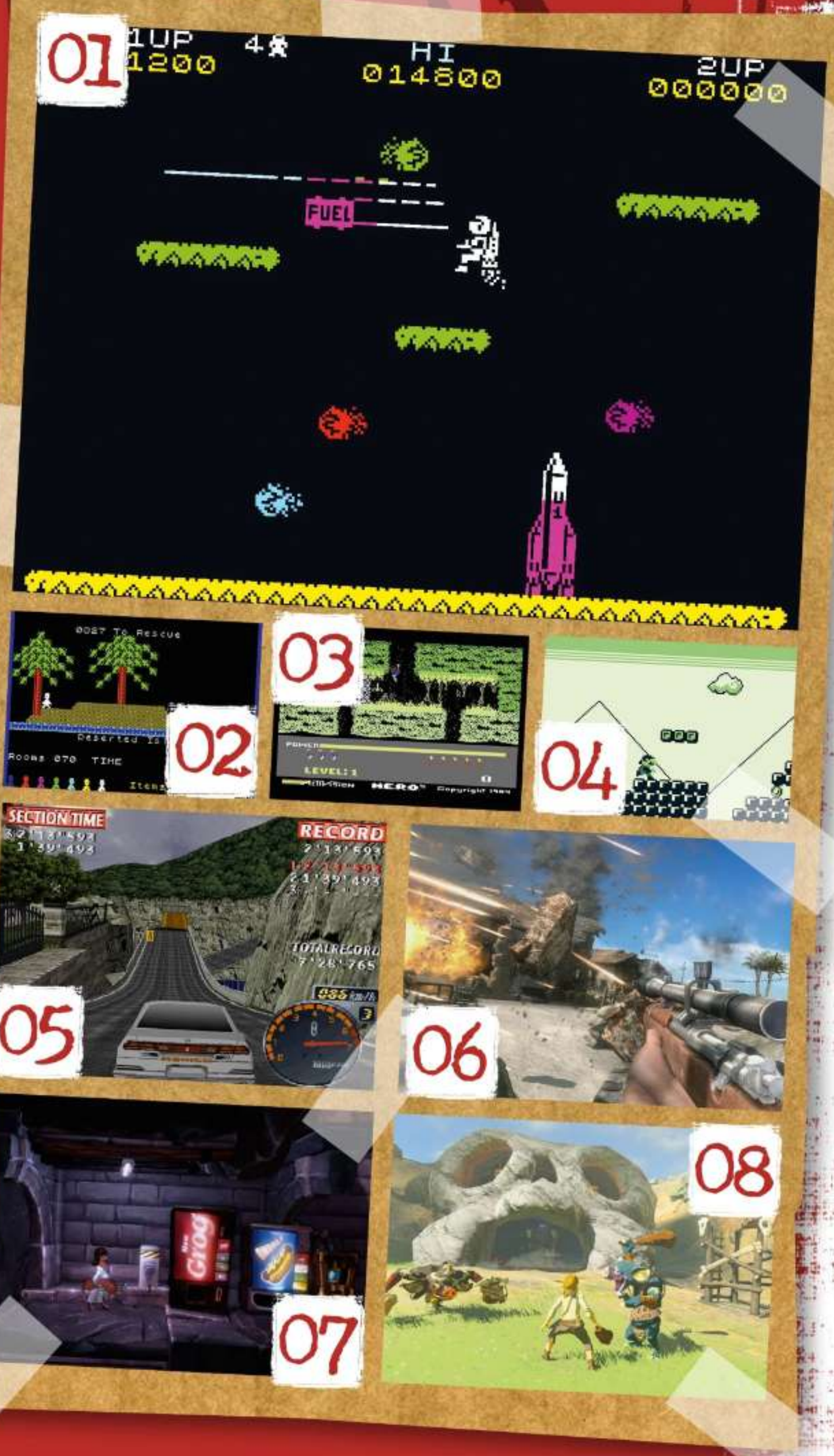
04 Super Mario Land (GAME BOY)
On a flight a few years back, the headrest entertainment randomly included a Game Boy emulator, and this was one of the games available. I blazed through it, barely missing a beat, having played it to death on my first Game Boy. It's the perfect platformer.

05 Rage Racer (PLAYSTATION)
Gran Turismo passed me by as I was addicted to *Rage Racer*. For me, this was the pinnacle of the series, with the finest rollercoaster-style tracks since *Stunt Car Racer*.

06 Battlefield 1943 (PLAYSTATION 3)
This is where multiplayer gaming first clicked for me, and I've since lost hundreds of hours to it. I've tried the recent *Battlefield* games but they just ain't *'43*. I know the three maps inside out, and I've witnessed every trick in the book, but I still see amazing things every time I play.

07 The Cave (PLAYSTATION 3)
I'm a big Ron Gilbert fan, and it was a close call between the first *Monkey Island* and this 2013 adventure. I've played through it with my kids about ten times, exploring every permutation, and it keeps on giving. It's so dark, so funny, so underrated.

08 The Legend Of Zelda: Breath Of The Wild (SWITCH)
This needs no justification, so I won't attempt it. This is why Nintendo is my number one. It simply makes the best games.



THE HISTORY OF

HERETIC

KEY FIGURES FROM RAVEN SOFTWARE TAKE US BACK IN TIME TO WITNESS THE STORY OF THIS REVERED DARK FANTASY SERIES

WORDS BY ROBERT ZAK

» Brian Raffel still heads up Raven Software today.

[PC] *Heretic*'s weapons are largely a fantasy spin on *Doom*, such as the Dragon Claw – its answer to the chain gun.

Raven Software is synonymous with big shooters like *Soldier Of Fortune, Quake 4, Wolfenstein* and *Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare Remastered,* but that wasn't always the case. The studio started out specialising in RPGs, until in 1991 when the team discovered that just down the street from its tiny office in Madison, Wisconsin, a studio called id Software was working on something special. It was complete serendipity. In a city not renowned for its games development community (at a time when such communities barely existed), two talented studios were working side by side, completely unaware of each other.

Though for some of that time, Raven Software was only just scraping the definition of a 'studio'. Officially formed in 1990, the developer began as something of a passion project for brothers Brian and Steve Raffel. Enamoured with *Dungeons & Dragons*, Raven's first game was an RPG for Electronic Arts called *Black Crypt*.

Brian Raffel recalls these fledgling days at Raven. "We were working on the Amiga at that time because that's what we played on, but EA wanted *Black Crypt* to be a PC game," he tells us. "So we put out an ad for a games programmer who knows PCs, and that's when id Software got in touch. Little did we know, they were a mile away from us."

id Software hadn't yet earned its reputation as a groundbreaking developer, but the Raffel brothers were some of the first people to have peeked into the engine room of its impending innovations. Brian laughs at the retrospective absurdity of meeting the id team – the Carmacks, Romero, Kevin Cloud and Tom Hall – for the first time, and hosting them in Raven's $200/month office in a drywall company. "They saw our ad, came over, and really liked what we were doing", Brian says. "They also showed us what they were working on at the time, which was *Wolfenstein 3D*. We were pretty amazed."

» Kevin Schilder was the lead sound designer for the series.

» [PC] *Heretic*'s enemies often attack you en-masse, so make sure you've got the relevant firepower to deal with them.

» [PC] The slick presentation of *Heretic* will be instantly familiar to anyone that's played a certain game from id Software...

The Raven and id Software teams soon became friendly, going out to dinner and movies, and of course exchanging ideas about videogames. There was even talk of getting Raven to work on *Wolfenstein 3D*, but the studio was tied into a publishing deal with EA over *Black Crypt* and couldn't do it.

Brian got John Carmack to teach Raven about the technology behind *Wolfenstein 3D*. "We could tell he was this brilliant guy from the moment we met him," Brian says. "I asked him to teach our guys and he goes, 'Yeah, it's really easy.' So we sent a couple of programmers, who came back and said, 'No way in hell. He's light years ahead of us.'"

"WE PUT OUT AN AD FOR A GAMES PROGRAMMER WHO KNOWS PCS, AND THAT'S WHEN ID SOFTWARE GOT IN TOUCH. LITTLE DID WE KNOW THEY WERE A MILE AWAY FROM US"
BRIAN RAFFEL

» [PC] These fearsome creatures chuck fireballs that can cause a large amount of damage to those who get hit by them.

"ONE OF THE PROGRAMMERS CAME UP WITH THE IDEA TO MOVE THE HORIZON LINE, WHICH MADE IT FEEL LIKE YOU WERE FLYING"
BRIAN RAFFEL

id Software didn't stay in Madison for long, moving out to Texas in 1991. But a bond had been established, so when id looked to go into publishing games following the monstrous success of *Wolfenstein 3D* in 1992 then *Doom* in 1993, it picked two developers to make *Doom* engine (also known as id Tech 1) games. One was Cygnus Studios, which would start working on *Strife*, the other was Raven, which would work directly with id on *Heretic*. In 1992, John Romero was assigned as producer on *Heretic*, overseeing the team at Raven Software as it embarked on its foray into first-person shooters.

Where today we have the term 'Soulslike' for every action RPG that shares sensibilities with FromSoftware's *Dark Souls* series, this was a time when every first-person shooter was a '*Doom* clone'. The tag may have done a disservice to some games that really set out to forge their own identity, but Raven's dark fantasy shooter *Heretic* would become a *Doom* clone in the very purest sense of the term.

It has relatively linear level design, based around finding keys to open new areas. Even the box art was drawn by *Doom* artist Gerald Brom, showing the game's hero, Corvus, decimating demons with a wand in much the same positioning as Doomguy. It truly is a dark fantasy version of *Doom*.

But *Heretic* didn't start out that way. The original plan was for *Heretic* to be an RPG, but with all the bells and whistles of the *Doom* engine (a concept executed more elaborately in the 1996 shooter *Strife*). Those plans were quickly quashed when John Carmack saw the game. Brian remembers his reaction. "He basically said, 'You guys are getting too RPGish. Just copy *Doom*, follow the recipe but with different weapons,'" he says. "Of course, we added our own weapons and artefacts and made it our own, but John was right. At that time *Doom* was the thing to follow."

With John Romero at the helm, Raven's development team for *Heretic* grew into double figures, and it moved into a basement office beneath an FBI building. Eric Biessman, a designer who worked across the entire *Heretic*/*Hexen* series, also doubled as something of an FBI courier. "I was doing level design, writing, and playing office manager, and I would run mail up to the FBI when it was misdelivered," he says. "It was always weird. They had this bulletproof glass desk and I had to give them my licence every time."

Having John Romero at the helm was enlightening for the team at Raven, particularly as id wanted the team to make *Heretic* using Steve Jobs' little-known NeXT computers used to make *Doom*. "We had to take it in turns to learn it," Brian says. "When we had to do the maps it was a bit of a chokepoint. We made it work, but it was another hurdle to overcome."

Crucially, working under John Romero was great fun. Eric remembers one late-night shift in particular. "I was working at 3am, and Romero would call asking to make some changes to creature or weapon placement. We talked about it for a bit and then he played the theme music over the phone for one of the *Doom* ports he'd just gotten," he says. "He is just a guy that loves making games and having fun. I always respected that and try to keep it in the front of my head. Hold on to the passion of creativity over everything else."

Development of *Heretic* was smooth and, as Brian puts it, "simple". Roles on the development team were fluid, with each designer assigned a certain number of levels, monsters and weapons to create. This free-form development helped spawn strange and imaginative weapons like the Hellstaff, which fired missiles then exploded into a cloud of acid rain. In a small holdover from Raven's RPG roots, you can amass an inventory of artefacts. Chief among these is the Tome Of Power which unlocks a powerful alternative fire for all the weapons, and the Morph Ovum which turns enemies into chickens.

Despite *Heretic*'s reputation as a *Doom* clone, Raven introduced its own innovations to the id Tech engine. *Heretic* was the first id Tech game to let players look up and down, for example. "One of the programmers came up with the idea to move the horizon line, which made it feel like you were flying," recalls Brian. "That was a nice hook."

Something that this series would become renowned for was sound design, with haunting music, wheezing demons and ominous distant sounds like clanging metal or rattling chains reverberating through its labyrinths of dark halls.

» [PC] The lore of *Hexen* and the Serpent Riders ran just deep enough that the community would expand it through fan fiction.

» [PC] *Hexen*'s diverse settings – such as this swamp – are one way in which the series distinguishes itself from *Doom*.

[PC] *Hexen*'s colour palette is an eye-catching mix of earthy id Tech tones with explosions of colour thanks to weapon effects and a penchant for stained-glass windows.

[PC] The first boss you encounter in *Hexen* is no match for Daedolon the Mage's lightning spell.

merciful

» [PC] If you try to 'do a *Doom*' and use the famous IDFKA all-weapons cheat code, you'll be stripped of all your gear.

» [PC] *Hexen* is notorious for its platforming segments, which are a nightmare to traverse with mouse movement.

» [PC] The Fighter in *Hexen* is quite possibly the first ever melee-oriented brute of FPS games.

Kevin Schilder, who went on to be lead sound designer across the series, came to *Heretic* in 1994 having never created audio for a videogame. "The first thing I learned was that there was going to be a war between creative ideas and technical limitations," he says.

Kevin started by making sounds in standard CD quality (44k/16-bit), but found that many of them sounded terrible when downsampled to 11k/8-bit for the game. "Eventually, I developed the skill of being able to hear and anticipate what was going to work in terms of downsampled sound frequency content," he tells us.

Heretic has a minimal soundscape, but it's based around impact – booming weapon sounds, and satisfying feedback for inflicting death. "It had to be really satisfying to damage and kill other players or monsters," Kevin says. "So I spent a good amount of time making really solid crunch and squish death sounds, and death voices."

Kevin also wanted to evoke horror, and one of the great touches brought over from *Doom* was the timing of monster noises. "They had a 'sight' sound that played when their AI activated," Kevin recalls. "That sound had to scare or startle you. Once you learned the sound, you knew you were in trouble when you heard it."

Heretic rode the FPS revolution started by *Doom*, and was a success when it launched in 1994. It was a perfect gateway into FPS development for Raven, allowing the studio to indulge its roots in RPGs and fantasy while getting to work with the bleeding-edge of game engines. "Being able to create a fantasy-style game with that same tech was so perfect for our studio and the people there," Eric reminisces fondly.

No sooner had *Heretic* launched, Raven set about the sequel, starting a pattern that would see a new series entry or expansion released every year up to 1998.

It was a fast turnover, but very much the norm for a studio of Raven's size, says Kevin. "We needed games to get done and shipped and bring in income to survive," he reveals. "The money only came from game sales, so you needed to get new ones out there fairly often."

Brian compares Raven's and id's situations after releasing *Heretic* and *Doom* respectively, ▶

HEXING THE FUTURE

COULD A RESURGENCE IN CLASSIC FPS GAMES BRING US A NEW HEXEN?

One of the greatest genre comebacks in videogames in recent years has been the old-school first-person shooter. From *Doom* and *Wolfenstein*'s masterful reboots, to Nineties-inspired indie shooters like *Dusk*, *Ion Fury* and *Amid Evil* (the closest thing we have to a *Hexen* spiritual successor). So it seems like a perfect time to resurrect *Hexen*, giving it that polished 'rip-and-tear' *Doom* reboot treatment, while trying to blend in its RPG elements and nonlinear design.

Unfortunately, the IP exists in licensing limbo. In 2016, id Software's long-standing creative director Tim Willits said that the rights to the game are actually split between id Software and Activision, "That's a complicated thing... We, id Software, have the publishing rights, and Activision has the development rights. So that's a bit of a hairy situation as one of us would have to relinquish those rights."

It looks like those Serpent Riders are staying in their stables for now.

TOP 15 WEAPONS FROM THE SERIES

HEXEN AND HERETIC PLAY HOST TO SOME OF THE MOST INVENTIVE FPS WEAPONS OF ALL TIME, FULLY EXPLOITING THE FACT THAT IN A WORLD OF DEMONS AND MAGIC, ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE

FIREMACE

HERETIC

Its mace appearance is already great, but its spikes rotate when you shoot, causing metal balls to fly at your enemies. The balls become big and bouncy when it's powered up.

PORKELATOR

HEXEN

This largely acts in the same way as the Morph Ovum, except – as the name would suggest – it turns enemies into little piggies. Oink oink… the ultimate humiliation.

BLOODSCOURGE

HEXEN

The Mage's most powerful weapon, shoots a trio of burning bladed balls that home in on hapless enemies.

MORPH OVUM

HERETIC

Technically, this is an artefact rather than a 'weapon', but still it's a clucking delight to use as it turns enemies into chickens. Particularly fun and humiliating when used on enemies in multiplayer.

QUIETUS

HEXEN

The Fighter's final weapon is an epic, flaming sword that fires a diagonal arc of five green orbs that deal huge damage. It's best used at close range so all the orbs hit the same enemy.

HELLSTAFF

HERETIC

Effectively, this is *Heretic*'s answer to *Doom*'s Plasma Gun, firing a rapid volley of red missiles from a ram's skull. Powered up, it creates a lethal cloud of acid rain above targets.

ARC OF DEATH

HEXEN

One of the best-looking weapons in the game sees the Mage harness lightning energy between his hands, then unleash electric pillars that latch onto enemies and don't let go.

GAUNTLETS OF THE NECROMANCER

HERETIC

The magical version of *Doom*'s chainsaw, this melee attack drains your enemies' health. That green hand-lightning is one of the coolest animations in the series.

WRAITHVERGE

HEXEN

This crucifix-shaped weapon fires an orb that releases four ghosts, which proceed to seek out enemies and tear them apart. Fire it off a few times and watch your minions unleash hell.

PHOENIX ROD

HERETIC

A powerful staff that produces slow orbs which deal huge collateral damage on impact. Turns crowds of enemies into puddles of gib, much like the BFG in *Doom*.

METEOR STAFF

HEXEN II

Wielded by the Crusader, this staff hurls rocks at enemies and summons a tornado when powered up. It can even be used for rocket jumps, making it a speedrunner's dream.

STORM BOW

HERETIC II

A variant on the Hellstaff from the first *Heretic*, the arrows from this bow explode on impact, spawning an acid rain cloud above the target. Fire a few of these to create an acid storm.

MAGIC MISSILES

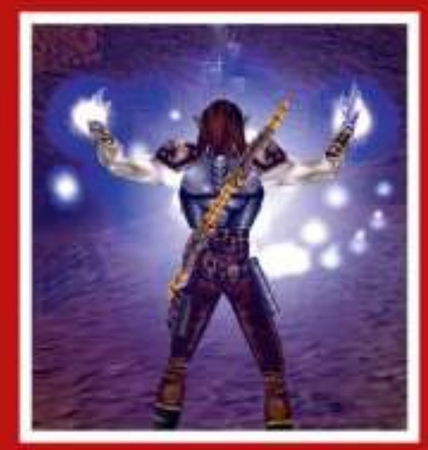
HEXEN II

These magical bolts don't deal out huge amounts of damage, but the animations as the Necromancer rolls his blackened fingers and turns pages in his tome never get old.

DURHNWOOD STAFF

HERETIC II

Sure, it may just *look* like a staff/spear but it makes you feel like a martial arts black belt master thanks to a wide variety of melee moves. It's a good weapon for dismemberment, too.



SPHERE OF ANNIHILATION

HERETIC II

This powerful spell releases a blue orb that does big collateral damage. Power it up and it'll also zap enemies en route to its target.

[PC] Each chapter in *Heretic II* was capped off by a boss, introduced by a flashy cinematic preamble.

» [PC] The Harpies in *Heretic II*'s swamp level are insufferable, leading us to suspect they're the progenitors of *Morrowind*'s Cliff Racers.

[PC] The time-travelling *Hexen II* took players to Egypt, Rome, medieval Europe and ancient Mesoamerica.

» [PC] *Hexen II* pits you against four horsemen bosses before you tackle the final Serpent Rider Eidolon.

▶ pointing out that id found itself in the rare position where its games were so successful that it could afford to gestate on new ideas. "They really earned it," he says. "But 'what's done is done' didn't apply to us."

So Raven pushed on with *Hexen*, which would become the most popular game in the series and the one in which Raven got to implement ideas that distinguished it from *Doom*. It would feature nonlinear exploration, hubs branching off into distinct fantasy biomes like wastelands, swamps and temples, and a choice of three different character classes.

The class system, which lets players pick from a Fighter, Cleric or Mage, each with their own health pools, mana pools and unique weapon sets, was John Romero's idea. It was a great one, too, becoming one of the game's distinctive features, but Brian says that John Carmack, who didn't directly work on the game, critiqued it. "Carmack said that we should've made more generic weapons that everyone could use, then add a layer of unique weapons for each class," Brian remembers. "Say, six weapons with two shared ones, which would've given you more things to find and more abilities."

For *Hexen*, the Raven team grew to around 35 people, allowing for more clearly defined roles. But Brian remained very fluid and hands-on with the project, never more so than when his hands were used in the actual game.

The impressive detail on the Mage's hands, with their veins aggressively webbing over the bones as his falcate fingers harnessed magical energies, belonged to Brian. "Those were mine!" he says with some pride. "We'd take pictures, scan them up and draw over them."

Hexen would be the most artistically distinct game in the series, the dirty browns and greys synonymous with early *Doom* engine games broken up by explosions of colour in stained-glass windows and bright(ish) outdoor areas. Raven also took inspiration from *Doom* in its creation of monsters. Unlike id, the studio couldn't afford to get professionally sculpted models, so the team created clay ones instead. "We would put them on a spindle and rotate them so we had all the directions right," says Brian. "Then we'd scan them, take them into DPaint and use them as reference to create creatures." This resulted in more detailed, more weighty monster designs than in *Heretic*.

Later in development, Steve Raffel convinced his brother to get a 3D software package to speed up the process, but it wasn't an easy sell. "My brother had to talk me into it because I was the finance guy at the time, and I thought '$1,000!? That's ridiculous.'" Brian put out in the end, and the Fighter's gauntlets were the first in-game item to be created with the help of a 3D package.

Hexen's heavy atmosphere was bolstered by Kevin's expanded sound design. "I was able to create ambient sound FX like wind, weather, insects, birds, bells and so on," he recalls. "Each map was given a set of ambient sounds to use and they played randomly in different areas. Pretty simple idea now, but it was new at the time." It also utilised CD audio, with much of the MIDI music replaced by CD-quality music when the disc was inserted.

The RPG elements of *Hexen* were designed to make the game more challenging, rather than specifically being a nod to the Raven team's passion for *D&D*. The developers forced the player to rely more on inventory items, which now expanded to shields, healing potions and even summonable creatures – like a Minotaur – to aid the player.

It was the implementation of puzzles that caused some complications. "We ventured into the RPG realm and added more puzzles to make things more challenging, but we did make some mistakes," admits Brian. "We were still learning, but 'you push a button, and *somewhere* you hear a door open' should never have happened. One of the designers – I won't name names – loved to punish the player and did a good job of it."

> **"WE'D TAKE PICTURES, SCAN THEM UP AND DRAW OVER THEM"**
> **BRIAN RAFFEL**

Hexen's obscure puzzle design wasn't unusual at a time when a chain of events in a game would be held together by the most tenuous logical connections. But this was associated with slower, more meditative adventure games, not ultraviolent shooters.

While *Hexen*'s puzzles can't be considered a success, we float the idea to Brian that a degree of obscurity has come back into fashion in the aftermath of the *Dark Souls* series, and that there are elements of *Hexen*'s design – the hubs, the shortcuts that connect seemingly distinct areas, the inscrutable puzzles – that even foreshadow it. Brian appreciates the comparison. "What can I say? We were ahead of our time!"

***Hexen* launched in October 1995, squeezing in just before the industry shifted wholesale to 3D graphics with the arrival of *Quake* (courtesy of Raven's friends at id).** It was perfectly timed. The game sold very well, even amassing a fan community that would churn out fan fiction around the Serpent Riders, Corvus, and *Hexen*'s heroes.

But the game's success couldn't mask the fact that the pixel era was coming to a close. With Raven having privileged access to id's new *Quake* engine, and with John Romero remaining committed to the series, it made sense for the next *Hexen* game to make the jump to full 3D. ▶

[PC] The swishy and bouncy melee combat of *Heretic II* would serve as a springboard for Raven's *Jedi Knight* games.

[PC] *Heretic II*'s Storm Bow explodes on contact and can damage you if you get too close.

▶ The original plan was for the game to be called *Hecatomb*, which would be the third and final entry in the series. John Romero was toying with ambitious ideas, such as a good-evil alignment system that would affect the game world, and an RPG-style levelling system, while moving the hub design style of *Hexen* into a 3D world. Unfortunately, things would start getting a bit more complicated in development.

Firstly, John Romero left id Software after *Quake* was completed in 1996, following creative disagreements with John Carmack. *Hexen II* lost its producer, and with no id developers left on the team, the years of collaboration with the studio were over.

Activision, which was set to distribute the game, took over the publishing process. In terms of development, Raven was left to its own devices and had to make the daunting jump to 3D without support from the engine's creators. "That was a big leap for us," explains Brian. "To go from pixels to polygons was not an easy chore."

"Development was extremely computer-intensive", says Eric. "I could work on a map, start it compiling, and walk away for hours before it would give me something I could look at."

The tools for building in 3D space were limited, too. "We had one camera, one window that only showed an XY view, and the simple 'Z-checker' – a window that purely showed if something was resting on top of something else," remembers Eric. "I love to throw out the proverbial, 'Get off my lawn!' to people that complain about the tools we have now."

The new engine was also an opportunity for experimentation. *Hexen II* introduced a new playable class – the Assassin (and later the Demoness in the expansion), and a light attributes and XP levelling system. It even managed to beat John Romero's pet project *Daikatana* in sending players on a time-travelling adventure across four distinct epochs.

But the game also lost something from its predecessor. It was less lively than *Hexen*, with a muggy colour palette and far fewer enemies on-screen at once. "On *Quake*, id really liked its browns and greys, which was something we had to deal with," rues Brian. It also doubled down on obscure puzzles that frequently forced the player to backtrack. "*Hexen II* made the story, puzzles and adventure more of a priority than the combat," says Kevin. "To me, maybe it lost some of the original identity that made it fun to play."

Brian takes some responsibility for the awkward puzzles of *Hexen II*. "We went further into the RPG idea, but were mostly left with these stupid-crazy puzzles". He was the brains behind the infamous constellation puzzle, which involved spinning a wheel to a constellation, but having to take into account that it had changed due to the Earth's tilt over thousands of years. "It was something I learned in school and thought it'd be clever, but it just went too deep."

Hexen II didn't sell well, with the only available figures suggesting it shifted just over 30,000 units. Nevertheless, Activision bought Raven Software towards the end of the game's development in 1997, securing the studio's future, and looking to see out the series with *Heretic II*.

It was an ambitious break from what the series was known for, reflecting Raven's creative autonomy now that id was no longer involved. Most notably, it shifted to a third-person perspective, with a focus on cinematic storytelling and fast, fluid combat. Classic weapons returned, but the melee staff was now a viable option, enabling *Heretic* hero Corvus to somersault, backflip off walls and even use it as a springboard to fly kick enemies.

"We wanted to start something fresh. Lara Croft was big at the time, and we were trying to think a little more console-y," says Brian. "People like to see the character and see them upgraded." To that end, you could see armour upgrades on Corvus, but also battle wounds as he took punishment, and the effects of plague afflicting his flesh.

Raven's growing comfort with 3D graphics was on show in the impressive character animations and in-game cutscenes, which charted Corvus' quest to end a mysterious plague ravaging the land. Obscure puzzles and hubs were replaced with sharp, mostly

STRAIGHT FROM THE SOURCE

HOW TO SUPERCHARGE YOUR PC COPIES OF HERETIC AND HEXEN

Just like the original *Doom* games, *Hexen* and *Heretic* run on the id Tech 1 engine. They can, therefore, be beautifully modernised thanks to the miracle of source ports (and the fact that Raven released the source code in 1999). We recommend GZDoom, which will embellish these games with HD resolutions, dynamic lighting, proper mouselook, texture filtering, and other features.

It's very easy to set up, too. First, you need to have the games installed on your system (you can grab them on Steam). Then just download GZDoom from zdoom.org, extract it, and copy the WAD files from the *Hexen* and *Heretic* 'base' folders into the GZDoom directory. Then double-click 'gzdoom.exe' and select the game you want to play.

Alternatively, you can extract the GZDoom archive into the games' 'base' folders, then just double-click 'gzdoom.exe' to run the applications. The advantage here is that the gzdoom.exe is tied to a specific game, so you can add it as a non-Steam title to your Steam library.

"HEXEN II MADE THE STORY, PUZZLES AND ADVENTURE MORE OF A PRIORITY THAN THE COMBAT"
KEVIN SCHILDER

linear levels that gave the game a swift, satisfying pacing. "Better hardware, memory and processing power all helped us create a credible story."

Brian is particularly proud of the multiplayer, which was one of the first times a third-person competitive shooter went online. It allowed for plenty of player creativity in combining offensive and defensive abilities, and melee and ranged combat. The verticality of the levels and acrobatic characters anticipated the kind of action we'd see in *Quake 3* and *Unreal Tournament* a few years later.

For all its technical and mechanical prowess, *Heretic II* was another commercial failure. Both Brian and Eric attribute this to the fact that it was overshadowed by *Half-Life*, which launched two weeks later. Still, the game received plenty of praise and its mechanics would live on and evolve in Raven's excellent *Jedi Knight* games.

The *Heretic/Hexen* series was uniquely timed, straddling videogame technology's seismic leap from 2.5D to 3D – a leap spearheaded by none other than the company that gave Raven the opportunity to make the series.

There's an elliptical irony that just as id Software's innovation with id Tech engine in 1991 gave rise to the *Heretic/Hexen* series, its move into 3D marked its downfall. But more important than these games are the people behind them, and this collaboration between two modest studios in Madison, Wisconsin would give rise to two of the most successful FPS developers.

The series may be over, but it was the making of a talented studio in Raven. Everyone we interviewed for this feature looks back on the series fondly, with their sentiments best summed up by Brian Raffel, who to this day remains the head of Raven Software. "Without id, we wouldn't have made it to where we are today." ✱

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO...

GAMES THAT NEVER SAW THE LIGHT OF DAY

» [PS2] *Polaroid Pete*'s localisation was finished enough for review, but not of a brilliant quality.

POLAROID PETE

For years, the very existence of this localisation was a matter of debate. Find out just how close it got before failing to hit the market...

Words by Nick Thorpe

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** JVC

» **DEVELOPER:** IREM

» **SYSTEM:** PLAYSTATION 2

» **DUE FOR RELEASE:** 2002

Sony has often been credited for taking gaming mainstream with its PlayStation consoles, with the original being the first home console to sell over 100 million units, while the second is the best-selling home console of all time. Some players feel that made gaming less interesting, as the consoles brought with them a shift towards longer, less immediate games and the dominance of annual mega-franchises. While Sony wasn't perfect during this era, with even the likes of SNK and Sega falling foul of its content approval process at times, we don't agree. Such a view ignores the fact that publishers were willing to try weird things, simply because the sheer size of those consoles' audiences meant that there were potential markets for them.

Bizarre Japanese games seemed to be particularly prized – Eidos established the Fresh Games label just for oddities like *Mr Moskeeto*, while budget publishers like Essential Games and 505 GameStreet brought over the likes of *Global Defence Force* and *Michigan: Report From Hell*. And while it's better known for making stereos than software, JVC had a long history of bringing unusual Japanese games to Europe. While the bizarre Mega-CD shooter *Keio Flying Squadron* was one of its own, developed in-house in Japan, it had signed up the likes of *No One Can Stop Mr Domino* and *Power Diggerz* from other developers during the PlayStation era. The company looked set to continue this trend into the PlayStation 2 years too, as it had signed a deal with Irem to bring *Gekisha Boy 2* to the console.

The original *Gekisha Boy* (or '*Gekibo*' for short) was released for the PC Engine in 1992. That game saw you wandering along a street, taking photos of interesting and often bizarre things that happened as you went, and scoring points for capturing the best images. The game had been a cult favourite in Japan but never received a localisation. In fact, it was left alone for almost a decade until Irem decided to revive the series, creating a sequel for the PS2 and authorising a PlayStation port of the original in D3 Publisher's *Simple 2000* series, under the name *The Cameraman*. Both of these releases were completed as planned, and change hands for around £50 today – rather less than the original

» [PS2] Godzilla attacks Ginza – just another day in Tokyo, but perfect fodder for Pete Goldman's camera.

» [PS2] Jumping allows you to get a better look at the top of buildings.

SIMILAR GAMES THAT DID GET RELEASED...

GEKISHA BOY

1992, IREM

■ Yes, it's the original PC Engine favourite. As much as we love the more modern take on the game, there's a deliberate roughness about the pixel art that really appeals to us. Plus, it clearly deserves some recognition for its originality.

POKÉMON SNAP

1999, HAL LABORATORY/PAX SOFTNICA

■ You've gotta catch 'em all, but this time on film as this *Pokémon* spin-off casts you as a photographer. By using bait and other items, you can lure the critters out and make them do funny things. This might be the best photography game ever.

PAPARAZZI

2004, HUNEX

■ Rather than taking photos of bizarre incidents in the streets or cool animals, *Paparazzi* is a low-budget game that has you taking photos of models. It all seems to be a bit of an excuse for staring at polygonal women, if we're being honest.

» [PS2] Getting what the editor in chief asks for will result in a front page headline story for Pete.

"The game was announced as 'the most original game on the PS2'"

PC Engine game, which sells for around the £100 mark.

The sequel was announced as "the most original game on the PS2" in September 2001, with the new English title of *Polaroid Pete*, made possible by a licensing deal with the camera manufacturer. In the press release, JVC outlined the game's plot: "You play Pete Goldman, an intrepid reporter for the '*Planet Times*' on assignment to capture Japan's wildest events and win the Pulitzer Prize. As a fearless newshound you will go to any extreme to get the picture you want." A set of instructions was issued alongside it, and a range of Japanese screenshots of the game were provided, suggesting that the localisation wasn't yet ready to show at this point. In November of that year, a playing guide was issued to journalists, and it's at this point that review copies would have been sent out.

Polaroid Pete was previewed in issue 14 of the *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine*, where it was described as "daring, genuinely funny and playable", but also "unlikely to attract the attention of a genre-hoovering game-buying public." The magazine also explained that the USB camera and printer compatibility of the Japanese game had been removed for the PAL release. The game was reviewed in issue 16, scoring 7/10. Reviewer Ste Curran described it as

» JVC closed its game-publishing branch before *Polaroid Pete* could hit shelves.

» [PS2] Pop culture references abound – here's the T-800, casually walking through Akihabara.

"crazy, funny and smothered in badly translated 'Engrish'", but "not the sort of game that will have you gagging for retakes". *Play* also reviewed the game in issue 85, with Simon Cann awarding the game 80% and recommending it to "those looking for something a little bit different". The most concrete release date suggested is 7 December 2001, in the preview. Both reviews put the price at £29.99, which *Play* considered "a tad high" for a game that "could probably run on PSone quite easily".

Unfortunately, the game wasn't released in December 2001. In fact, the existence of the PAL version was a matter of debate for a number of years, until someone came forward with footage and a prototype disc for sale in 2018. The build date of 9 January 2002 and message on the disc ('Review code – 14/1/02') actually puts it past the point at which the other magazine reviews would have been written, and suggests that *Polaroid Pete* missed its originally scheduled release date, but was still slated for publication in 2002. Unfortunately, JVC's game-publishing operation folded before that could happen. Avalon Interactive picked up many of the publisher's games for reissue, and the last information available suggests that the intention was to finally release *Polaroid Pete* in June 2002, but this never came to pass and no retail copies appear to have been manufactured at any point.

While the localised game never officially saw release, it has been preserved, and of course the Japanese game is available to buy – so thankfully, *Polaroid Pete* isn't lost. ✱

» [PS2] Polaroid i-Zone branding was splashed throughout the game on billboards. Pete's laptop is JVC-branded, too.

The History Of Animal Crossing™

Work, bills, commitments, taxes... yeah, real life sucks. Let's cast off all of that rubbish and go live among the woodland creatures for a while as we reflect on the impact and evolution of Nintendo's oh-so-pleasant life sim

Words by Luke Albigés and Nick Thorpe

» [GameCube] Lost items can be reclaimed at the police station, including those that aren't actually yours. Claim responsibly... or just swipe the lot.
Booker
Oh, that's... a flicker shirt. I think... So...would that be yours?

» [GameCube] A few special digging spots spawn every day – grab a shovel and go get yourself some sweet fossils or creepy new Gyroids.

Few companies can turn failure into a success story quite like Nintendo. Whether it's the Wii U games that tanked on release but are suddenly must-have games on Switch, or turning the fortunes of the laughed-out-of-town DS around almost overnight and growing it into one of the most successful handhelds ever, the Midas touch is very real. Even in its darkest hours, Nintendo has proven itself capable of coming back better than ever, and this story begins with what, in hindsight, has to be seen as one of the greatest misplays in the company's history. Whether through stubbornness, legal landmines, reliance on existing expertise or something else entirely, the N64 was the only console of its generation that wasn't riding the CD wave. But as the benefits of this new medium came to light and close partners started taking their games to platforms where they could both expand their horizons and mass-produce products for less, Nintendo reluctantly reached for the 'conform' button. Well, sort of.

So botched was the Japan-only 64DD disc add-on for the N64 that it warrants further discussion. The add-on was announced before the N64 itself even shipped, and offered support for a magnetic disk solution that could only offer 10% of the capacity of a CD. The promise of cartridge load times with disc capacities and internet connectivity was ahead of its time in terms of vision, but by the time of its arrival in December 1999 it was decidedly behind it in execution, and the 64DD ended up with just nine released titles. However, it's the list of planned games that ended up elsewhere as a result of this

30+ MILLION UNITS

Animal Crossing has been a huge success for Nintendo, with the brand selling over 30 million units.

abject failure that proves far more interesting. Series like *Dragon Quest* and *Resident Evil* took their next games to new consoles, most of the more ambitious projects that required the hybrid tech were cancelled outright, while many huge first-party titles like *Zelda*, *Donkey Kong* and *Paper Mario* were scaled back to work as pure cart-only games for N64. You might see the title *Dobutsu No Mori* among the list of such games that eventually made their way to N64 and think little of it, but it's actually a pretty big deal – that's what you might know as *Animal Forest*, the quirky and unique village life simulation that would later be upgraded, improved, and re-released the following generation as *Animal Crossing*.

One of the flagship features of the 64DD was to have a system-level real-time clock, which the very concept of *Dobutsu No Mori* was built around. In order to ship the game on cartridge, Nintendo needed to include a clock chip in the cart itself to facilitate the game's direct correlation between real-world time and in-game time – a more complex and costly process that caused the game to release right at the tail end of the N64's life in April 2001, just a few months before the launch of the GameCube. Despite the game's charming aesthetic and unique premise, it was swiftly buried under hype for more technically impressive games, but Nintendo wasn't going to let the animals escape quite so readily. Instead, the decision was made to port *Dobutsu No Mori* across to the GameCube in order to give the game a second chance. The on-board clock and calendar

» [3DS] *New Leaf*'s rolling scenery is a lovely little touch that helps keep performance steady and makes the town feel bigger than it really is.

» [GameCube] The first hour or so serves as a tutorial where you work for Nook and run through the main ways to earn Bells. After that, you're on your own.

» [GameCube] Trees can hide cool items, but shake too many and you'll usually wind up angering bees and getting stung like this poor fella.

NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

A few of the fuzzy faces you can expect to befriend

TORTIMER

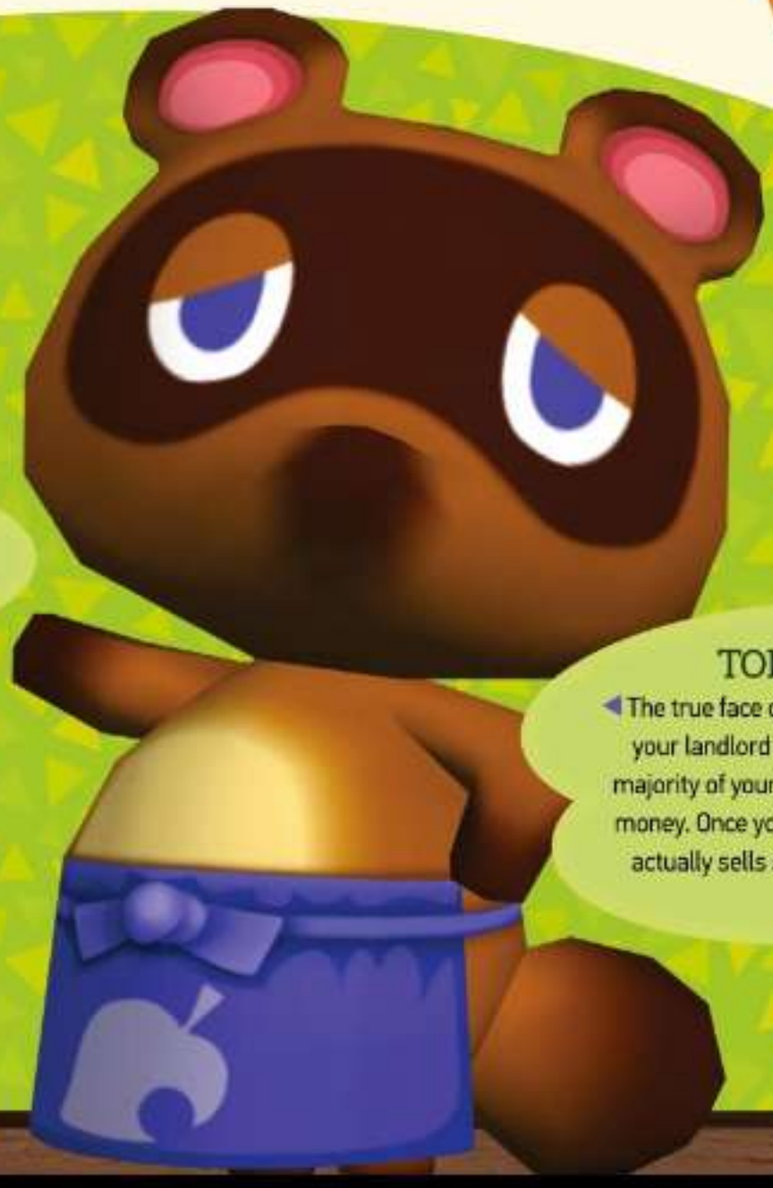
◀ The town's elderly mayor is a staple of the series, although he's often too busy to be out and about. You'll probably only bump into him during special events, which he always attends and/or officiates.

KK SLIDER

▲ Your resident bard, this pick-wielding pooch shows up on Saturday evenings to serenade you with various delightful tunes, should you ask him to play for you. He's always happy to do so.

REDD

▶ There's something shady about this fox, although you should still check out his totally legit wares whenever his market rolls into town. Does this look like someone who would rip you off? Um...



TOM NOOK

◀ The true face of evil, Nook is technically your landlord and you will spend the majority of your time in town owing him money. Once you get past that, his shop actually sells some pretty neat stuff.

Animal Crossing

» [GameCube] You can ride the train to other players' towns, although visits are much easier to make in later versions of the game.

» [GameCube] Chatting to Rover on your first train ride into town determines your gender and starting appearance, based on how you answer his questions.

» [GameCube] Get your hands on a fishing rod and you'll be able to reel in all kinds of sea creatures, which vary by season.

of Nintendo's new console opened up even more possibilities and its graphically simple nature made moving home less demanding that it might have been for other more technically challenging games, allowing Nintendo to get the enhanced version onto GameCube in Japan by the end of that same year. The villagers weren't quite ready for an overseas visit just yet, however – unsurprisingly, a game about conversing with hundreds of unique characters in unique scenarios is quite the project for a localisation team, causing the US version to land nine months later in September 2002. The PAL release didn't come until a full two years after that, finally showing up in September 2004.

***Animal Crossing* is a game where you do... well, not a lot, really.** It's one of the most chilled-out games ever made, one where you just wander around your little village, making friends with the neighbouring animal folk and doing menial tasks to slowly, slooowly chip away at your crushing debt to resident capitalist tyrant Tom Nook – the devil in a raccoon disguise, basically. His laissez-faire approach to collecting his dues is welcome, but he still charges exorbitant fees just to improve your squalid little living space into something you can be proud to call a home, tempting you all the while with an ever-changing stock of neat furniture and useful tools that will only serve to drain your Bells – the game's suitably quaint currency – and prolong the process of upgrading and expanding your homestead. Similarly, museum curator Blathers would have you turn over valuable fossils, fish and bugs to him in the interest of preservation, though these are among the more lucrative items to sell for healthy profits. You've got a raccoon exploiting your materialistic nature on one side and an owl tapping into your completionist compulsions on the other, a pincer movement designed to keep your Bell balance in check and drag out the process of one day maybe ridding yourself of debt... it's a delightful and relaxing game at face value but viewed like this,

BLATHERS

▼ Curator of the museum and general know-it-all, Blathers will take your bugs and rarities off you to display them in the museum. Best to visit him at night, as he's a little sleepy during the day.

JOAN

▼ Bells burning a hole in your pocket? Time to start playing the turnip Stalk Market. Joan's veggies – only available on Sunday mornings – fluctuate in price over the next week, but be sure to sell before they go bad.

MR RESETTI

▲ This mole will turn up to give you an earful any time you quit the game without saving and then return, in order to dissuade save scumming. His rants get longer the more times you do it, so... y'know, don't.

SAHARAH

▲ Unlike Redd, Saharah's wares are all above board and her selection of rare carpets and wallpapers always makes her worth chatting to if you're lucky enough to be paid a visit.

it can almost feel like a busman's holiday – a fuzzy, primary-coloured recreation of what is taking place on the other side of the television screen for many of us.

Why is this not a problem? Well, is it fine for these woodland critters to intentionally slow down the one part of the game that can be seen as making genuine, tangible gameplay progress? Well, the answer is twofold. First off, the day-to-day rigmarole isn't a grind – it's what's fun about the game. It's not something designed to be played for hours at a time, rather an experience best enjoyed piecemeal over a much longer time frame. Regular events and holidays promote return visits even when you might not otherwise have planned to play, while the simple act of checking in daily to see what's new in the village is satisfying in its own way – there are always new things to dig up, catch, harvest and work for, and even just seeing your home and its surroundings at different times of day and during different seasons helps you develop an attachment to this second life you've chosen for yourself, as well as with those who surround you. And that's the second reason why slow progress isn't an issue: it makes the connections you make and the bonds you develop with the other villagers feel more special, more important, more real. Check in daily with your furry friends and they'll meaningfully grow around you, adopting your mannerisms and fashion, writing you letters, offering you gifts and even expressing concern when you don't show your face in town for a few days. The more you play, the more you become part of the town, and coming back to the game after a little time away to a letter from a villager telling you that they've moved away can be a bitter pill to swallow. But there'll be new friends to make. There always are, forever.

For a game born of failed hardware, it was somewhat surprising to see *Animal Crossing* court console add-ons for a second time with its support for the e-Reader Game Boy Advance card scanner. The game already supported linking to a GBA for several novel features, primarily the ability to visit the offshore island in search of rare fruits and extra Bells, but also to offer a pattern designer tool for use at the clothes shop and to allow handheld play of some of the featured NES games that players might be able to find, win, or buy for their homes. Thee-Reader support took this a step further, allowing players to scan special collectible cards via a connected GBA and e-Reader to introduce new elements to the town – music cards could change the town's tune to be one of wandering musician KK Slider's songs, pattern cards offered unique (often Nintendo-themed) clothing designs, while scanning a character card would cause that particular animal to write to the player with a gift. It was a novelty at best and wasn't even included for the PAL release, but the four sets of released cards still serve as a cool collector's item for fans, even if only a few of them ever offered anything that bordered on useful in the game.

While this low-level GBA interaction made it pretty clear that the handheld wasn't capable of pushing out a full *Animal Crossing* game of its own, the fact that its successor launched with an N64 port as its flagship launch title told an entirely different story. The little-and-often gameplay style of *Animal Crossing* made the title a perfect fit for a portable console like the DS, with *Animal Crossing: Wild World* arriving just outside the handheld's first year. It was a perfect storm – the console was struggling to find its footing, but here was this game with universal appeal and a playstyle that couldn't be more perfectly suited to a portable system, and *Wild World* proved to be a monumental success, eventually bagging itself a place in the top ten most successful games in the system's entire library. It was ▶

800,000 UNITS

■ *Animal Crossing: New Leaf* sold over 800,000 units in its first week on sale in Japan.

» [GameCube] Chatting to villagers regularly and sending them letters and gifts is the best way to avoid them packing their bags and leaving town.

» [GameCube] Nook's dialogue is often pretty aggressive. He tends to apologise swiftly, but he can never disguise the fact that he is an evil, evil creature at heart.

"Slow progress isn't an issue: it makes the bonds you develop feel more important, more real"

MABEL & SABLE ABLE

▼ These twins run the clothes shop, and you'll quickly notice that Mabel is a little more outgoing than her sister. Keep visiting, though, and Sable might open up to you eventually...

KAPP'N

▶ If you're crossing over to the island, this salty sea dog (well, kappa) will be your ferryman. Expect to hear some cracking shanties on your crossing, many of them likely about snails.

Animal Crossing

KING OF THE VILLAGE

Six tips to help make town life a little easier

GET FRUITY

Any fruit found naturally in your own village won't sell for a lot of Bells, but Tom Nook will pay well over the odds for non-native produce. Bring back something exotic and either sell it for a quick buck, or plant and grow it if you're playing the long game.

TURNIP TIME

Joan's turnips can make you huge stacks of Bells if you play often enough to check prices regularly. Tom Nook's offer changes twice per day, so you can easily wait for one that gives you a great return on your investment... so long as you don't get too greedy and let your nest egg rot.

SET YOUR CALENDAR

You should aim to catch holidays, festivals and other special events whenever possible. There are usually rare goodies to grab, but you could always tinker with your console calendar to cheat your way into them if you're unable to catch them live.

YOU'RE FIRED

Not a fan of one of your current neighbours? Wind them up with Pitfall Seeds and by snubbing their requests while playing nice with the rest of the town and there's a good chance they'll pack their bags. Visit other towns to scout for fresh blood to make their eviction more likely.

LIVE WITHIN YOUR MEANS

Yes, there are loads of cool things you *could* buy to decorate your dingy little home, but it's a much better idea to live off hand-me-down items until you've paid off Tom Nook enough to have a house that's actually worth decorating.

EARN MORE CASH

Sometimes, rocks will spit out bags of Bells when struck with a shovel. Usually, you can only get a handful of money bags out of them, but you can game the system by digging holes directly behind you before you start whacking to prevent knockback and get more hits in.

"New Leaf made meaningful, productive and player-friendly changes to the core concept"

» [DS] The second screen in *Wild World* is mainly used for menus, but passing balloons can drop items if you have a slingshot to pop them with.

▶ a well-deserved victory, too. *Wild World* iterated on *Animal Crossing*'s core concepts spectacularly, doing away with screen transitions to make the full village one big open play space (replete with a new 'rolling' visual style to make it feel even larger), offering a second screen and touch control for simpler inventory management, and incorporating online components to allow friends to visit one another remotely, although removing timed holiday events in order to ease the localisation process was met with some criticism. This simplification did allow Nintendo to get the game out across all major territories in just three months compared to the original's three years, though, so it proved to be a sacrifice worth making in the interest of getting everyone playing at the same time.

After a rather innocuous inception, *Animal Crossing* was finally a top-flight brand for Nintendo – in terms of first-party DS titles, only the holy trinity of *Mario*, *Zelda* and *Pokémon* tracked better, in fact. It came as no surprise, then, that Nintendo would look to continue this success on its must-have new home console and the insane popularity of the Wii served as

» [Wii] The two sisters who run this clothes shop will allow you to create your own designs and patterns. It's another example of the franchise's many nice touches.

a perfect launchpad to propel this charming franchise to even greater heights. What a shame, then, that *Let's Go To The City* (or *City Folk*, as it was known in the US) managed to miss the point so spectacularly. This is a series that revels in the escapism of quiet village life and while it was more or less business as usual on that front (with seasonal holidays reinstated and a few minor improvements), the inclusion of a new city area to visit really put pay to the idea of settling down in a remote rural village away from the hustle and bustle of urban life. While the core loop of *Animal Crossing* may not be the easiest of things to expand or iterate upon in any meaningful way, this just felt like a misstep, a move at odds with what the game was all about. The addition of optional voice chat during online multiplayer really didn't sit right, either – in a fantasy world where everyone speaks in adorable gobbledegook noises and twee catchphrases, the last thing you want to hear is another human gibbering on in the background.

2020

■ The next *Animal Crossing* game for Nintendo Switch, *New Horizons*, debuts.

But what better way to right the ship than by leaving these odd design decisions in the past and turning over a 'new leaf'. Returning to handhelds in the hope of replicating the success of *Wild World*, *Animal Crossing: New Leaf* arrived on 3DS in 2013 and for the first time, it made meaningful, productive and player-friendly changes to the core concept. Rather than coming into town as a fresh-faced nobody, you were instead welcomed as the town's new mayor – a role that proved to be just as easy as Tortimer had made it look for the previous decade. It was a new system that didn't change the core gameplay loop one bit, but that catered better to individual habits and play styles, letting those with limited play time pass bills to have shops open earlier or close later, for instance, or to have other villagers assist in upkeep to keep your town spotless. This new position of power also allowed for significant quality-of-life improvements, from building bridges to making remote spots on the map more accessible to constructing new facilities, each with their own functions and additional characters to meet. While the core gameplay changed little, these seemingly minor tweaks made it all the more respectful of player time – a welcome feature in a game designed to be played daily and for months on end. The gameplay utility of the city's extra facilities was retained, but crossing the train tracks to visit a slightly suburban-feeling row of shops and houses felt less out of place than upping sticks for a full-on city, with buildings on the outskirts retaining that rustic feel of the main village and even including some staple components such as the museum to free up even more space in your own little plot of paradise. With Nook's kids taking over the general store, Tom himself moved into the real estate business (because of course he did) and continued to scalp new residents for sub-standard housing... not even the mayor is safe from the dollar-signs-for-eyes raccoon fiend, it appears.

Still, Tom Nook's most audacious scheme has been reserved for *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*, launching on Nintendo Switch in 2020. Tricky Tom has sold you a travel package to a deserted island paradise, and expects you and a couple of fellow scam vict– erm, *holidaymakers* to develop a new settlement from scratch, beginning with nothing more than some hastily erected tents. Thanks to the island's lack of basic infrastructure, you'll need to explore the island to gather raw materials – they're a pretty crucial part of the crafting system, which allows you to build new tools and furniture. There's a rather agreeable hippy commune vibe to this whole arrangement, until you remember that a certain raccoon is getting a ready-made holiday resort out of the whole deal. The new game also offers you unprecedented freedom to develop your community, as you can choose where animals set up their new homes and even reshape the island itself with the new magic shovel, a feature fans have dreamed of for years.

It's quite remarkable that *Animal Crossing* is up there with Nintendo's top franchises despite being their polar opposite – so many Nintendo titles are built on pure, glorious gameplay, while *Animal Crossing* features very little of what would traditionally be described as such. Regardless, its unique nature as a sedate and charming console game that can be played all year round makes *Animal Crossing* something we'll never stop playing. Mainly because we're perpetually in debt to a ruthless capitalist raccoon, but also because they're wonderful games to kick back and enjoy when you just want to turn off the outside world for an hour or two. ✱

» [Switch] By giving players the power to reshape the island itself, *Animal Crossing* inches slightly closer to traditional city-building games.

SPINNING AROUND

The spin-off titles that left town to do their own thing

ANIMAL CROSSING: HAPPY HOME DESIGNER

■ Doubling down on the house customisation aspect of the mainline games, *Happy Home Designer* bins off the rest of the life sim stuff and is significantly weaker as a result. While there *is* an odd satisfaction to getting a resident's brief spot-on, you can get the same kind of passive satisfaction from any number of brain-dissolving reality TV shows, so stick to the mainline games.

ANIMAL CROSSING PLAZA

■ Not really a game so much as a modified reskin of the Wii U's Miiverse feature, this oddity let you wander round a simple town square, chatting with various characters from *New Leaf* (the 3DS game this spin-off sort of tied into) and... well, that's about it. It was removed from the eShop at the end of 2014, so you couldn't play it now even if you wanted to. Good job you don't.

ANIMAL CROSSING: AMIIBO FESTIVAL

■ It's *Mario Party* but without the minigames, and it's about as good as that sounds. Not only is the board game aspect really dull, but as the name suggests, a heavy reliance on Amiibo functionality means it's basically pointless if you don't have a solid selection of toys and cards to scan into the game. To be fair, it's basically pointless either way.

ANIMAL CROSSING: POCKET CAMP

■ Nintendo's foray into mobile gaming has been pretty darn successful and while this simplified spin-off might be among the weakest of the Nintendo apps, it's still been fairly well received. Decorating a campsite might not be quite as satisfying as having a full town to play with, but it's a small sacrifice for being able to get a small slice of *Animal Crossing* in seconds, whenever you like.

Peripheral Vision

ESSENTIAL GAME
DAYTONA USA 2001

Back when Genki's update of the classic arcade racing game was released, there were two common complaints. The first was that the PAL version had been stripped of all its online functionality, and the second was that the cars were wildly oversensitive, to the point that the twitchy controls became a genuine detriment to the action. As a result, *Daytona USA 2001* is one of the games that does noticeably improve with a steering wheel – it's possible to make finer movements than you can with the analogue stick, and the sensitivity can be further adjusted to get as close to the arcade game as possible.

Race Controller

» **PLATFORM:** Dreamcast » **RELEASED:** 1999
» **COST:** £44.99 (launch), £30+ (boxed, today), £15+ (unboxed, today)

One of the games that the Dreamcast's standard controller was particularly well suited to was driving games. With an analogue stick as standard and two analogue triggers for acceleration and braking, it offered all the basic control options necessary while leaving the d-pad and face buttons open for gear changes, viewpoint selection and all that other stuff. As a result, it's slightly odd that Sega would choose to release an official steering wheel peripheral – and, indeed, Sega Of America didn't even distribute the device itself, leaving Agetec to sell it under the name 'Rally Wheel' instead.

While most official Dreamcast peripherals follow the system's white colour scheme, the Race Wheel is offered in black, with orange buttons for menu navigation and gear changes. The device doesn't have foot pedals, instead using analogue paddles for acceleration and braking, and it features a slot for a VMU where you might typically find a gear stick. Players broadly feel that the wheel is solidly built and offers reasonable resistance when steering, but the criticisms are that it is light and prone to sliding around on some surfaces, and that it has quite a large dead zone – something fans have taken it upon themselves to rectify with mods. *

Race Controller fact

■ There are two models of the Race Controller, with the earlier HKT-7400 version including an extension port for possible additions such as foot pedals. The later HKT-7430 model removes this port, as it was never used.

I knew myself I wanted that same kind of excitement I heard every weekend with the 'NBA on NBC with Marv Albert,' because he was kind of the voice of the NBA at that time
Tim Kitzrow

TIM KITZROW

As the commentator for NBA Jam, Tim Kitzrow secured a place in gaming history. We listen intently to one of gaming's most iconic voices about enlivening sports titles and pinball machines

Words by Andrew Fisher

"Tim Kitzrow from downtown, Boomshakalaka!" is how Tim introduces himself. "I began as an actor in high school, then on to Purchase College to study acting in a fine arts conservatory. I studied all the classics – Shakespeare, Chekov. I went out to Albany, New York and worked in an outdoor Shakespeare theatre, and then to Los Angeles, and so I thought I was going to be doing classic stage work for the rest of my life. And as life takes its funny turns, I ended up in Chicago, and went to Second City Theatre to study with some of the greats there at the time – Chris Farley, Stephen Colbert, Steve Carell, so it was an exciting time to be in Chicago."

» Tim Kitzrow on court at the United Center, home of the Chicago Bulls. Photo courtesy of Tim Kitzrow.

What would you say are your influences, when it comes to your sense of humour?

Monty Python, that's probably the biggest one. Coming of age, when I was 11 years old and I saw that, it was like discovering The Beatles – their off-the-wall absurdity. And *SCTV – Second City TV*, that's why I wanted to go to Second City. There was John Candy, Joe Flaherty, Eugene Levy, Rick Moranis, Dave Thomas, and Katherine O'Hara, all those guys. That was the best American – Canadian, actually – comedy TV that anyone could hope for.

» Tim has been voicing pinball machines and videogames since the late Eighties.

How did you get a job doing the voices for pinball?

On the weekends, I was playing drums in kind of a 'weekend warrior' rock-and-roll band [The Lazy Boy Rockers], and one of the guys in the band was working at Midway/Bally/Williams and needed someone to do Mr Howell for a *Gilligan's Island* pinball game. I did a little, 'Gilligan!' And I started out doing pinball games. I did *Twilight Zone*, *Popeye*, *Attack From Mars*, *Judge Dredd*, *World Cup Soccer*, *NBA Fastbreak*, and many others.

What was it like working on the classic pinball tables?

I had always been a huge lover of pinball and the way it looked since I was a kid. I think for any kid, the first time you see a pinball table, your chin just comes over the top of the glass. You see that artwork and that ball bouncing off the bumpers. It was just so exciting to be asked to do it, and to do iconic voices like Rod Serling and Popeye. I was like a kid in a candy store, to just be involved in something [like] that... I know those tables are going to be around for a long time. And to have my sense of humour and my voice on it, the ultimate joy in this business is doing something that you love. Those pinball games still hold up, and there's a huge arcade and pinball resurgence. I've done some retro gaming shows, pinball shows and the pinball event in Portland. I went out to Shorty's Arcade, which is one of the most famous pinball arcades in the country, doing a tournament there. It is kind of a unique tribe, the pinball lovers. And the fact that, basically, it went out of existence in the late Eighties, early Nineties – it just disappeared. Midway died, I think there was one [pinball] company left in the United States at that time. Thank god now there is Stern, Jersey Jack, a couple of others. That was an era that almost completely got buried, and fortunately they're coming back stronger than ever right now. Stern Pinball's doing great.

Do you have any tables yourself?

I don't unfortunately. Back in the day, anyone who worked on any of the games was offered to ▶

SELECTED TIMELINE

GAMES

- **ELVIRA AND THE PARTY MONSTERS** [1989] PINBALL
- **GILLIGAN'S ISLAND** [1991] PINBALL
- **TWILIGHT ZONE** [1993] PINBALL
- **JUDGE DREDD** [1993] PINBALL
- **NBA JAM** [1993] ARCADE
- **NBA JAM: TOURNAMENT EDITION** [1994] ARCADE
- **POPEYE SAVES THE EARTH** [1994] PINBALL
- **ROAD SHOW [AKA RED & TED'S ROAD SHOW]** [1994] PINBALL
- **THE SHADOW** [1994] PINBALL
- **WORLD CUP SOCCER** [1994] PINBALL
- **ATTACK FROM MARS** [1995] PINBALL
- **NFL QUARTERBACK CLUB 96** [1995] VARIOUS
- **WHO DUNNIT?** [1995] PINBALL
- **COLLEGE SLAM** [1996] VARIOUS
- **ELVIRA: SCARED STIFF** [1996] PINBALL
- **FRANK THOMAS BIG HURT BASEBALL** [1996] VARIOUS
- **JUNK YARD** [1996] PINBALL
- **ALL-STAR 1997 FEATURING FRANK THOMAS** [1997] PLAYSTATION, SATURN
- **NBA FASTBREAK** [1997] PINBALL
- **WAYNE GRETZKY'S 3D HOCKEY '98** [1997] N64, PLAYSTATION
- **OLYMPIC HOCKEY NAGANO '98** [1998] N64
- **NBA SHOWTIME: NBA ON NBC** [1999] ARCADE, VARIOUS
- **REVENGE FROM MARS** [1999] PINBALL
- **NBA HOOPZ** [2001] DREAMCAST, PLAYSTATION, PS2
- **NHL HITZ 20-02** [2001] GAMECUBE, PS2, XBOX
- **NFL BLITZ 20-02** [2002] GAMECUBE, PS2, XBOX
- **NHL HITZ 20-03** [2002] GAMECUBE, PS2, XBOX
- **MLB SLUGFEST 20-03** [2002] GAMECUBE, PS2, XBOX
- **NHL HITZ PRO 2004** [2003] GAMECUBE, PS2, XBOX
- **MLB SLUGFEST 20-04** [2003] GAMECUBE, PS2, XBOX
- **THE ANGRY VIDEO GAME NERD ADVENTURES** [2013] 3DS, WII U, PC
- **MLB SLUGFEST LOADED** [2004] PS2, XBOX
- **MLB SLUGFEST 2006** [2006] PS2, XBOX
- **NBA** [2009] PINBALL
- **NBA JAM** [2010] PS3, XBOX 360, WII
- **NBA JAM: ON FIRE EDITION** [2011] PS3, XBOX 360
- **NFL BLITZ** [2012] PS3, XBOX 360
- **MUTANT FOOTBALL LEAGUE** [2017] PS4, XBOX ONE, PC
- **DEADPOOL** [2018] PINBAL
- **ELVIRA'S HOUSE OF HORRORS** [2019] PINBALL
- **RAGE 2** [2019] PS4, XBOX ONE, PC
- **DOTA 2** [TBC 2020] PC, MAC, LINUX

buy the game at cost, so I could have had *Jam* and *Blitz* and all my pinball tables probably for just a few hundred dollars. One of the guys, Sal De Vita, he was the co-creator on *NBA Jam* and worked on *Mortal Kombat*. He had ten of the games, including *Jam* and *Blitz*, in his basement, and when he moved out to Texas a few years back, he was like, 'Ahhh, I don't want to lug all this stuff with me,' and just called up a local arcade and gave it away. I was thinking, 'If he had autographed it...' And basically they were virgin, never used, just in his house. It would be worth so much at auction.

So what got you the plum job on *NBA Jam*?
I had been doing [pinball] for a couple of years when they were working on a game – without the *NBA Jam* title, which was not yet a licensed NBA game – and they asked me if I wanted to do the announcer role. So I was kind of in the right place at the right time to establish myself with those guys.

Did they want a particular style of voice?
Everything was wide open, I knew myself that I wanted that same kind of excitement I heard every weekend with the NBA on NBC with Marv Albert, because he was kind of the voice of the NBA at that time. And he certainly, as we all know, has that 'excited', over-the-top kind of energy. So I took my cue from that, and knew that it would be very short phrases. I wanted to give it that extra kind of 'push' to make sure there was excitement in the commentary that matched the gameplay.

Where did you record the voiceover?
The factory that made the pinball games had a little block of offices in the back, where all the sound and music guys were. There was a dark and dirty little 'back room' area. We had a recording booth there that was known as the 'Meat Locker' in the business. It was maybe four feet by four, next to the sound booth. That's where they would leave me. And for each session I could see maybe a hundred pinball games being tested and put together, so it was a fun and cool environment.

What did you think of the script when you first saw it?
Loved it. Jon Hey and I had been friends; Jon wrote the music and did the script. We were basically pulling all our lines from the iconic – if not cliched – phrases that Marv [Albert] and the TV broadcasts were known for.

Were there any particular lines you improvised or changed?
Well, it's hard to say from 26 years ago what we improvised. We always improvised. On all the pinball games, I would always say anything that came into my head after reading the lines on the page. So it was probably a little bit of both but I can't specifically remember which ones were improvised.

Did you enjoy playing *NBA Jam* yourself, and were you any good?
I did not, I sucked! When you are working on the game, there wasn't a game to play. And when I was finished I was on to doing *NFL Blitz* the next year. The *NBA Jam* arcade cabinet was in the cafeteria along with probably another dozen, two dozen classic Midway games and pinball tables. And I would only have a short time to have coffee and a bite to eat and then check out the games. With all the controllers and buttons, I was not a videogame player, it was just too frustrating to pick up quickly, so I would go on pinball or later on jump in the *Cruis'n USA* seat and crash a couple of Corvettes – something easy. So I didn't have the time on such a short break to learn that. I wasn't the kind of guy that was running out to arcades and putting quarters in, so I just never picked up the game.

» [SNES] He's on fire! Acclaim's *College Jam* had an NCAA licence and some familiar gameplay mechanics.

» [SNES] Acclaim added extra hidden characters, including Prince Charles, to home conversions of *NBA Jam: Tournament Edition*.

» [iOS] Four suspects and a dead butler – pinball table *WHO Dunnit?* features Tim's voice as Detective Nick Spade.

HE'S ON FIRE! Five games from Tim you should play

NBA JAM: TOURNAMENT EDITION (ARCADE)

■ This enhanced sequel is remembered for fast two-on-two basketball action, hidden characters and Tim's commentary. The gravity-defying dunks and 'on fire' mode gained so much energy from the short, snappy phrases. Tim had to wait until *NBA Showtime* to appear as a hidden character in a basketball game.

TWILIGHT ZONE (PINBALL)

■ In a twist worthy of the classic science fiction series, people thought it was the late Rod Serling's voice emerging from Midway's official pinball game – but it was actually Tim Kitzrow's impressive impersonation. With the bizarre bubblegum machine and oddball animations on the LED screen, this is a Nineties wide-body table.

NFL QUARTERBACK CLUB 96 (SNES)

■ The original game was based on the NFL's yearly *Quarterback Challenge*, with its objectives designed to test a quarterback's skills. Later titles became a full American football simulation with licensed names and real statistics. The 1996 edition added a classic mode, where players could replay scenarios based on historic NFL matches.

MUTANT LEAGUE FOOTBALL (PC)

■ With Kickstarter funding, original creator Michael Mendheim reimagined the Mega Drive's *Mutant Football League* (that played in a similar way to 2D *Madden*) into a 3D gridiron game featuring violence and mutated players – including skeletons, orcs and werewolves. This is all accompanied by some enthusiastic commentary from Tim.

ATTACK FROM MARS (PINBALL)

■ Another great pinball title released under the Bally label, the moving Martian figures and the giant flying saucer – which needs to be eliminated – adds atmosphere to the exciting high-scoring table. Tim provided multiple voices for this game and its sequel *Revenge From Mars*, a Pinball 2000 creation with its large interactive video monitor.

Have you ever featured as a hidden character in any of the *Jam* games?
I'm a secret character in *NBA Showtime*, but unfortunately I'd finished recording *NBA Jam* when the team decided they were going to put themselves in the game. You know, all the famous heads there were. Unfortunately, I was not around the day they did that.

How involved were you in promoting *NBA Jam*?
Not at all. Midway had really limited PR and marketing for that, I have seen a few commercials but I'm not certain if those were for the home release. I don't think in the era when the game first came out there was much promotion, apart from shipping the video highlights to all the distributors. So it wasn't until *NBA Jam* [*On Fire*] with EA Sports that we did some promotion. But I still thought that [EA] dropped the ball; they are known for their TV commercials and they missed out on an opportunity to put a great TV commercial out. That was unfortunate. A lot of people didn't even know that the EA version came out to this day... Worldwide, not many people knew it was related to the original *NBA Jam*. For a period of time afterwards, people said, 'I didn't know they redid it, I didn't know there was another one out.' *NBA Jam* was going to be a nice bonus freebie add-on you were going to get with *NBA Live*, and then there was a glitch in *Live* so they couldn't release that. When they had to pull it, *NBA Jam* was released at full price, which was $69 – the price of *Live*. That certainly was not sitting well with a lot of fans, who expected it to be free as they had marketed it. And then because it's an arcade title they thought that was too much, and I think most of your friends and game fans would say, 'Yeah, why are you charging 69 bucks for an arcade title?' The next year they dropped it to $19, which further angered a lot of the fans – the fans who had bought it, particularly. So they mucked it up, and they're supposed to be the guys at the top of the chain, who know how to market.

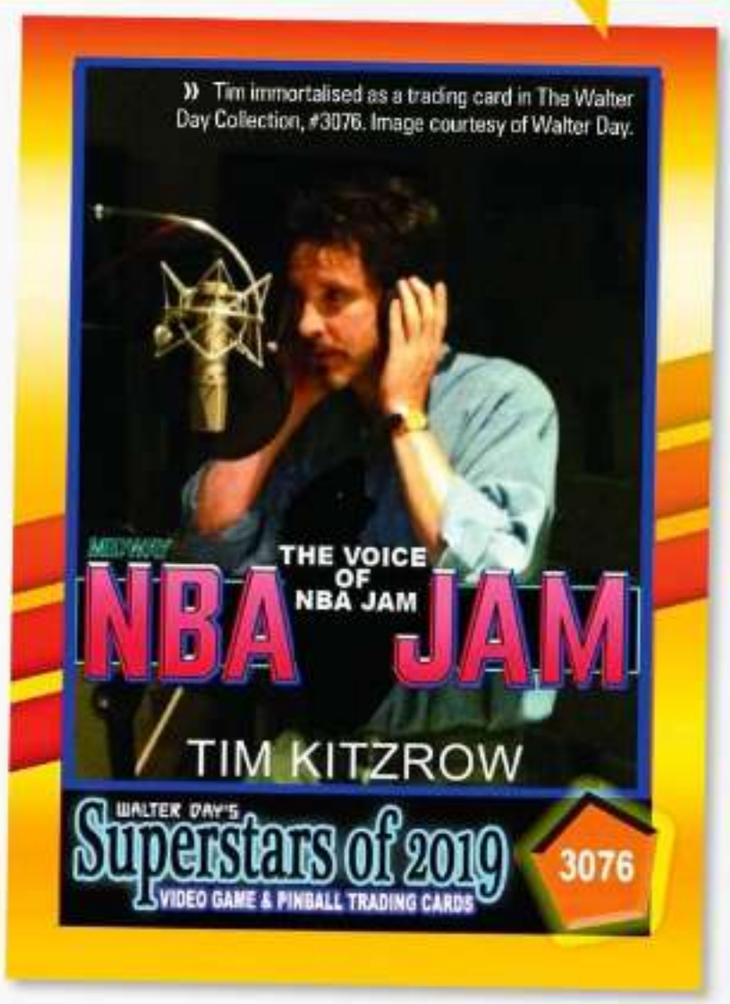
Did you have to record anything extra for the console versions of *NBA Jam*?
Yes, it was all re-recorded with Acclaim Studios. Midway then sold the title *NBA Jam* to collaborate with Acclaim, so once that title went to Acclaim for the home consoles [Midway] had to come up with new names. That was *NBA Showtime* and *Hangtime*, subsequent versions for the arcade.

How many of the *NBA Jam* sequels were you involved in?
I basically did all of them. One year they had Marv Albert do it, and it didn't go over that well. I don't think that he was really excited about doing it, it was different from what he does. It's a very tedious and boring process, and tough on the voice. I don't think he was paid better than me, but there were some reviews saying that they were not happy with him in the game – so they brought me back.

You've commentated on *NFL, NBA, NHL and MLB* games. Which is your favourite sport?
My favourite sport is basketball, and baseball a close second. I love them all – except hockey, unfortunately. I never really got into the NHL when I was younger. I used to play hockey on ponds and lakes, at school and went to all the high school games. They were exciting, but watching it on TV was never fun, especially before big-screen TVs. Baseball was my most fun to commentate on – *MLB Slugfest* was one of the highest critically rated videogames of its era. That was a whole lot of fun for me.

Are there any unfinished or unreleased titles you worked on?
No, the only one that was odd that I didn't do was *Hangtime* – they got the guy from the [Chicago] Bulls, Neil Funk. I also did one that I'd forgotten about with Midway called *NBA Hoopz*, with Shaquille

> "On all the pinball games, I would always say anything that came into my head after reading the lines on the page"
> Tim Kitzrow



» Tim immortalised as a trading card in The Walter Day Collection, #3076. Image courtesy of Walter Day.

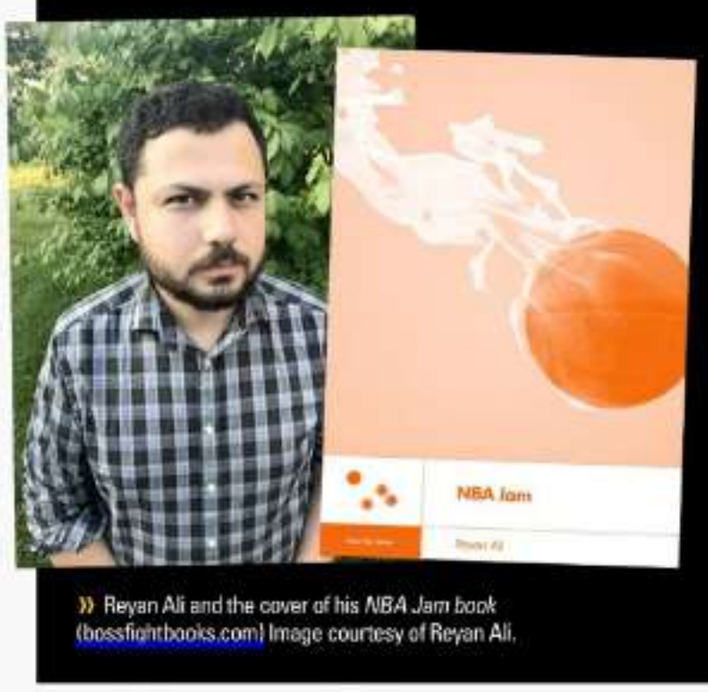
» [SNES] The SNES got an excellent conversion of *NBA Jam*, with Tim re-recording the commentary.

» [N64] Wayne Gretzky's 3D *Hockey '98* imitated the 'trail' graphics added to Fox Sports' ice hockey coverage.

BY THE BOOK

Reyan Ali on his extensive retelling of the NBA Jam story

"I first played *NBA Jam: Tournament Edition* for Mega Drive at around ten years old in Karachi, Pakistan circa 1996," says author Reyan Ali. "The speed, the dunks, and the commentary – it all left a big impact. I loved Tim's performance; he fired off line after line so passionately. While working on the book, I learned he was almost cut from the home games because of a dispute – the fact that we almost lost Tim blows my mind." So how did the book happen? "Boss Fight Books had an open call for pitches," says Reyan. "I went way overboard, doing 37 pages. They were into the idea, and I got to work in June 2015. I did 68 interviews by phone or email – Tim, the development team, Acclaim and Midway personnel, Eugene Jarvis, John Tobias, secret characters George Clinton and DJ Jazzy Jeff, the cheerleaders and many others. I did meet Tim, but that wasn't until the book was in its final stages. He has built up such a resume, what a monster talent. I hope 2020 is the year *NBA Jam* makes a return – with Tim's voice."



» Reyan Ali and the cover of his *NBA Jam* book (bossfightbooks.com) Image courtesy of Reyan Ali.

O'Neal on the cover. All the games I did, I was very lucky. The *NHL Hitz* titles I did, they were hugely successful and got great critical reviews, and the fan response was better than the EA *NHL* title at E3 at the time, so that was great. All the sports titles I did were very successful. *NFL Blitz* was huge, there's a very huge hardcore following still to this day.

> "I mean, my niche became the 'sports game announcer', but I loved doing pinball" Tim Kitzrow

Is there a particular game or series you would have liked to work on?

I can't really say. I mean, my niche obviously became the 'sports game announcer', but I actually loved doing pinball so much because it allowed you to do a wide range of characters. And the comedy, more true to my Second City roots. That's why I liked *MLB Slugfest* so much, it was because there was a lot of comedy in it and I wrote the script. I wrote the script for *NFL Blitz*, also.

Who are your favourite voiceover artists, in games or the wider media?

It has to be *The Simpsons*, Seth McFarlane and Mike Judge. All those three animated series are really my favourite, the versatility of all those guys. Dan Castellanata, Harry Shearer... just great, iconic voice actors.

Have you read Reyan Ali's recent book on *NBA Jam* yet?

I have, it's fantastic. Reyan's a terrific guy, he's a top-notch writer. Most people would have tried to slog this off in a short period of time and just capitalised on the title, and the stories that people know. But he made it more a story of the videogame era of the Nineties, you actually feel what is was like for a rock-and-roll band, kind of punk outfit which was Midway Games. You just hire incredible talent, and young talent, there were no rules. There were no bosses that went to school to make videogames – to create videogames they just said, 'Guys, make us some videogames.' It was an exciting era and he really captures that flavour in the book, and all the great titles – *Total Carnage*, *Smash TV*, and *Rampage* – that Midway was putting out. He gives the reader a real insight into how different the games are, how they were made. We did a show together in Cleveland, and we will do more things together. Right now there is also a documentary film coming out called *Insert Coin*, made by Josh Tsui. He was a graphic artist at Midway, and also was one of the characters in *Mortal Kombat*. I forget which one. [Sub-Zero in *Mortal Kombat II*, Liu Kang in *Mortal Kombat 4* and *Mortal Kombat Gold*, and Kung Lao in *Mortal Kombat Gold*.] He's done a wonderful documentary about the rise and fall of Midway, and it does focus on *NBA Jam*. That's going to premiere at the South By South West (SXSW) Film Festival in Austin on 18 March, which is huge.

Have you ever met any of the people you have imitated, or any of the sports stars?

I've had the good fortune of meeting a handful of the great NBA players. I was invited to the Hall Of Fame Class of 2018, and got to meet Steve Nash, Ray Allen and Grant Hill and everybody. I got to hang out with them and surprise them with a couple of lines. No one recognised my face, but when

» The John Trudeau-designed *Judge Dredd* pinball table features Tim in the role of Mega-City One's titular law enforcer.

» [SNES] Chicago mascot Benny The Bull and the new optional 'hotspots' feature (giving higher scores) in *NBA Jam: Tournament Edition*.

I was introduced to them I said, 'Grant Hill, you may have gotten your diploma from Duke but you got your NBA diploma from Dunkin' On U, Grant Hill, Boomshakalaka, Class of 2018!' 'Ray Allen, from he got game to Hall Of Fame, Ray Allen from downtown, nothing but net, Boomshakalaka!' That was great fun, they got a good kick out of that. I was hobnobbing with all the great NBA players. I was there for the weekend and the dinner the night before on the court. They sat me next to Bernard King, one of my heroes from the early days. So yeah, I've had a good opportunity to meet people. A lot of different things that I never would have expected. I've been doing some NBA appearances where I introduce the line-up, and then do the highlight video they show on the Jumbotron at halftime. I worked with the Golden State Warriors for their Championships, doing highlight videos. They would send me highlights, I would write my script. It's called 'Dub Jam' and they would put them on the Jumbotron during the game. I did highlights for the [Houston] Rockets, the [Washington] Wizards, and the LA Clippers. And the NBA Jam day that I appeared at. A lot of fun, 26 years later the *NBA Jam* train just keeps rolling!

What have you been involved in recently?

I've got a game that came out a couple of years ago. It's *Mutant Football League*, the creator Michael Mendheim is here in Chicago. He released it originally in 1993; it was called *Mutant League Football* – now it's *Mutant Football League*. It was originally on Sega [Mega Drive], there was a cartoon for it. This is an update, a spiritual successor. It was fun to get back in the seat and do a full-on, crazy, over-the-top cartoon voiceover for this without the NFL or major league sports company leaning over our shoulders. It was kinda no holds barred, we were able to make it more like an Adult Swim style. We parodied all the NFL teams. 'The Grim Bay Attackers taking on the New Columbia Patriots, with Bomb Shady in the shotgun formation. He pulls out a shotgun and shoots the defender's face off, giving a whole new meaning to the term shotgun formation! Brought to you by Mutant Football League.' That was fun, it was the critics' darling; one of the ten best videogames released that year, the best sports title. At E3 we got a recommendation for Best In Show. Michael's Kickstarter gave it a million-dollar budget, competing against $30 million dollar titles. So if anyone hasn't checked out *Mutant Football League*, take a look at it, it's fantastic. Recently, I've gotten back into doing some pinball games with Stern Pinball here in Chicago. I did a cameo on *Deadpool*, a vampire bat. And the new *Elvira* – I had done the previous two *Elvira* games, *Party Monsters* and *Scared Stiff*. We just did a new one called *Elvira House Of Horrors*. 'Elvira, I don't come out before dark, right now I'm getting nailed in the coffin big time. If the coffin's-a-rocking, don't come a-knocking!' So I'm basically Elvira's sidekick, a vampire, in that. I play six other dead characters that float down the screen and you have to hit with balls. So, wild fun and great to be back with some of the old team I worked with at Midway who are at Stern right now. I really enjoy doing pinball games.

Are you going to be involved in more games?

Yeah, I'm working on a demo right now which I can't talk about because of a non-disclosure [agreement], plenty of opportunities coming. And I did some fun stuff with the WWE. Austin Creed aka Xavier Woods, 'You might as well just hand Xavier his diploma because he just got his WWE degree from Stompin'-On-U, kaboom!' I watched a lot of their Survivor Series here in Chicago; I was backstage watching with celebrity guest Kyle Korber and helping commentate on the action. You can see a lot of my clips and my whole body of work at timkitzrow.com – especially the Warriors videos I was telling you about that I love. Or you can follow me on Twitter at @Tim_Kitzrow. ★

YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

Readers can get involved at www.retrogamer.net/forum

MR JENZIE: If you could voice any famous line in entertainment, what would that line of dialogue be?

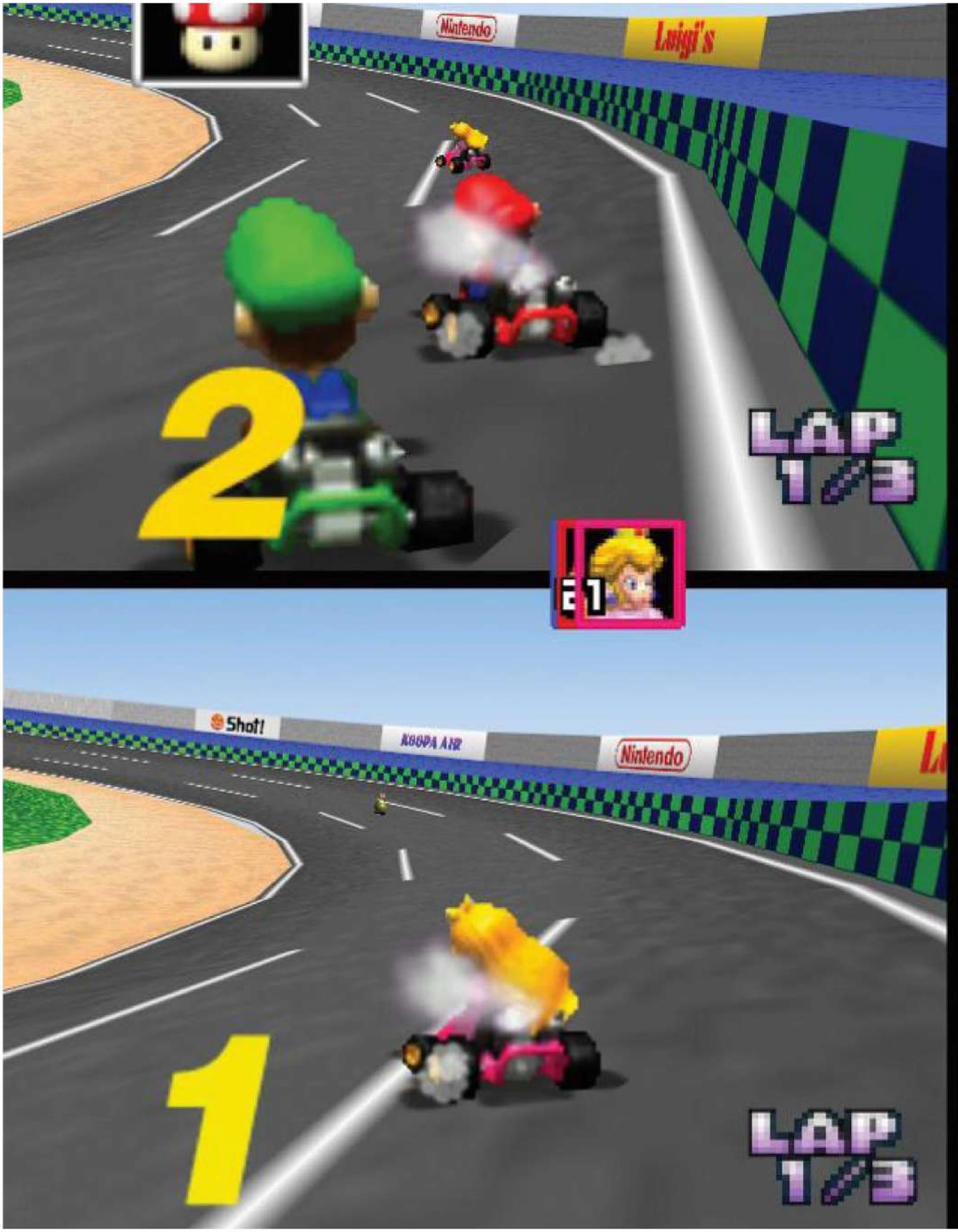
Wow, good question. Maybe I would take the guy from boxing (Michael Buffer) that does his [trademarked] famous line, and I'll change it a little bit. 'Are you ready to ruuumble, Boomshakalaka!' That guy, I heard he made like a million dollars to appear at the Super Bowl just to say that, so maybe someday I'll have the same cachet to do that at an All-Star game or something [laughs].

THEALEX: Are there any funny, interesting or controversial lines that never made it into a game?

Well, when you're in the studio for a long period of time, you would kid around. And sometimes, just for the sake of having a laugh, you would invent some lines [...]. We did a little 'blue' album with some *NBA Jam* stuff and somehow it actually made it into a console – it's the X-rated version of *NBA Jam*, actually. You can Google it and find it. So unfortunately I think it made the light of day, but it was just made to have fun in the studio.

MR JENZIE: When you were recording dialogue for games, was there a line you couldn't get hold of?

There was like a couple that I didn't really understand, or thought they were corny – like 'razzle-dazzle'. I always thought that was kind of a corny line, and a lot of folks just love that line when it came out of nowhere. Like... 'Razzle-dazzle!' It always sounded corny to me, but I like the way it sounds now. That reminds me [of] the other thing I had a tough time with when I did *NHL Hitz* – if you've ever looked at the roster of an NHL team, there's two vowels between 30 guys, all these European and Russian players, I had *no* idea of the pronunciation. And I had to do like ten to 15 different variations of different 'excited' levels for names that I could not pronounce, and if you screw it up and you're mid-speak, then you have to go back. That was a nightmare, like trying to read a Russian phone book from a burning building.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Mario Kart 64

SNEAKY TOAD FOR THE WIN

» NINTENDO 64 » 1996 » NINTENDO EAD

My wife Mel and I have been renting out our spare bedroom to students for years, and our latest tenant, Logan, hails from Hong Kong.

Typically, the students are knackered and jet lagged when they turn up, and Logan was no different, so we gave him some food and he went off to bed for a few hours.

Later on that day, suitably refreshed, Logan joined me for a gaming session with Mel and my daughter, Alice, in my retro shed, as he had told me about his love for videogames earlier that day. He joined us for a quick match of *GoldenEye* and while he struggled with the controls and had difficulty finding guns, he had a whale of a time, and thought it was hilarious when he managed to slap Alice to death after failing to equip his pistol.

We then moved over to *Mario Kart 64* and I asked him if he had played it before, to which he replied no. Despite his unfamiliarity with the game, it quickly became obvious that even though he'd never played the game before, Logan was very, very familiar with the series, and he quickly managed to make us all look very silly indeed as he sped around the tracks with Toad, bombarding us with Red and Green Shells and slowing us down with bananas and other items, laughing while he did so.

I've not had a game of multiplayer *Mario Kart 64* for years, but playing it with Logan, Mel and Alice instantly reminded me of those amazing multiplayer sessions I had enjoyed in my early twenties, either with Mel at our old home, or with friends on a Friday night when we first moved in to the home we live at now. Yes, the Blue Shell is a pain in the ass, and, yes, it's more of a party game than a racing game, but there's no denying that it remains a lot of fun, particularly when you tackle the more challenging 150cc mode. We ended up spending the best part of an hour on Nintendo's kart racer, only stopping for tea. Logan's already asked when we'll be playing it again, so he's clearly up for a rematch. Next time *I'll* be playing Toad, though. ✱

RETRORATED

>> It's been another solid month thanks to the latest Mega Man collection from Capcom, another Psikyo shooter collection from NIS America and a new HD update of the exceptional Devil May Cry 3. We even made Nick watch Sonic...

★ PICKS OF THE MONTH

DARRAN

Mega Man Zero/ZX Legacy Collection

Being the collector that I am, I chose to import the physical US version. I've not been disappointed.

DREW

Devil May Cry 3: SE

The crazy devs have added in-game style switching to the Nintendo Switch port. I used to hate the dumb menu system of the original.

» [Switch] We've always felt Zero was a bit cooler than regular old Mega Man, to be honest.

Mega Man Zero/ZX Legacy Collection

AND NOT A SPECTRUM IN SIGHT...

INFORMATION

- **SYSTEMS:** SWITCH (TESTED), PC, PLAYSTATION 4, XBOX ONE
- **PRICE:** £24.99
- **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- **DEVELOPER:** CAPCOM
- **PLAYERS:** 1-2

» [Switch] Whatever has been done to the art here, it doesn't look great and can't be switched off.

If you're feeling a little old right now and you're not quite sure why, it might well be because of Capcom's latest retro collection.

The six games in this compilation were released from 2002 to 2007 on the Game Boy Advance and Nintendo DS, and that's a legitimate retro collection in this day and age. The passage of time is truly terrifying. However, the years have been kind to Inti Creates' original work and Capcom has done an excellent job in presenting them for a modern audience.

For those of you as yet unacquainted with the *Mega Man Zero* games, they're a spin-off series starring Zero, the long-haired, lightsaber-wielding Reploid first introduced in the *Mega Man X* series. All four were originally released for the Game Boy Advance.

On the DS, *Mega Man ZX* and its sequel *Mega Man ZX Advent* focus on new characters who can use Biometal to transform into the likes of Zero and Mega Man X. All of the games are descended from the *Mega Man X* series, and as such they inherit the faster paced and more dynamic action from those games – it's possible to dash, wall-jump and swing your energy sword right from the original *Zero*, while additional weapons like a pseudo-grappling hook show up later to give you even more options.

All of the games presented here were well received when they originally released, and of the six only the very first one feels a little dated. From *Mega Man Zero 2* onwards, the speed of the action increases and the visuals improve fairly substantially. If you're familiar with the *Mega Man* games but not this specific subseries, there are some things that are worthy of note. Gaining and upgrading new skills and weapons remains a core element of the game, but this isn't tied strictly to defeating bosses, with more RPG-style progression. Unlike the classic *Mega Man* games, which present you with a selection of stages to be tackled in any order, the *Zero* and *ZX* games have a greater narrative focus, and are therefore more linear in some respects.

If Capcom had simply presented these games as they were this would have already been a pretty good

» Zero has been a popular addition to the *Mega Man* series' vast and varied cast since his introduction in *Mega Man X*, where he plays the role of the titular character's friend and ally. After a variety of playable appearances in the *Mega Man X* series, Capcom decided to take a chance on Zero as the face of a handheld spin-off series, with Inti Creates handling development duties. The success of *Mega Man Zero* led to three Game Boy Advance sequels and the two *Mega Man ZX* games for DS, all of which are collected together in this compilation.

» [Switch] The DS games are displayed like this, with the sub-screen off to one side.

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD

MEGA MAN: THE WILY WARS (MEGA DRIVE)

▼ SOMETHING NEW

MEGA MAN X LEGACY COLLECTION (VARIOUS)

collection, but the company has clearly gone the extra mile in trying to create the definitive way to play these games. One of the biggest barriers to entry for the *Mega Man* series has always been its high difficulty level, and that's true of these spin-offs too. To mitigate that, Capcom has introduced the Save Assist system that essentially places checkpoints in each level, greatly reducing the frustration factor. If that's still not enough, there's a Casual Scenario mode that greatly reduces the difficulty of the games, designed to allow players to enjoy each game's story. For the DS games, the lower screen's functionality is retained on a small sub-screen, controlled with the right analogue stick and ZR button.

Some of the collection's other modernisation features are appreciated, but not quite as well implemented or impactful as the difficulty-related additions. Some art upgrades of mixed quality have been introduced – the FMV sequences from the DS instalments look absolutely fantastic, but static art scenes have been given some attempt at enhancement that leaves them looking slightly blotchy compared to the crisp pixel art in the games. Two screen filters are included, a simple smoothing one and a CRT filter which seems odd, given that the games were originally enjoyed on handhelds with LCD displays. Elsewhere, the ability to reconfigure your controls is welcome, but oddly implemented and clunky. It must be done separately for each specific game and can't be done from the main menu, plus your configuration is tied to your game save rather than an overall system file – which leads to frustration if you have to reload after a mission failure, as it reverts any settings changes.

» [Switch] If the FMV here hasn't come from source files, the restoration job deserves special recognition.

» [Switch] Even the early bosses can be tough going, so we're quite glad Capcom has offered some difficulty options.

Just about everything else is top-notch, though. The new Z-Chaser mode allows players to race a friend through stages, and if you're short on live opponents, you can challenge the CPU or download replay data from players online. The e-Reader functions from *Zero 3* and connectivity functions between the later *Zero* and *ZX* games have been preserved, Japanese versions are available for every game, and a selection of unlockable cards serve as a way to track your in-game achievements, too. There's also a music player as well as a generous gallery with hundreds of pieces of art to see, though the significance of the images may be lost on newcomers due to lack of contextualising text. All of the music and the majority of the gallery is open to enjoy as soon as you start the game, which is nice.

Capcom has been on a bit of a roll in recent years with its retro releases, and this collection is up there with the best of them. While other compilations might offer more games for your money, few treat the games they offer with such care and respect. Despite some minor complaints, this collection gets far more right than it does wrong and offers the best way to play these games today. ✱

In a nutshell

Capcom has taken six good games and actually elevated them by addressing a common complaint, and then doubled down by providing just about every extra feature you could want. This is an early contender for compilation of the year.

>> Score **90%**

RETRO ROUNDUP

WE LOOK AT THE LATEST RETRO-RELATED RELEASES

★ PICK OF THE MONTH

Lode Runner Legacy

» **System:** PS4 (tested), Switch, PC » **Buy it from:** Online, Strictly Limited Games » **Buy it for:** £9.49

If you've ever played a *Lode Runner* game before, there's not much that will come as a surprise in Tozai Games' latest entry in the series. As ever, the goal is to run around grabbing gold while evading enemies or trapping them in pits, before escaping the level by climbing up a ladder to the sky. While the game introduces some fun extra enemy types and gigantic levels, the action never strays far from the core *Lode Runner* experience – so much so that the relatively cute voxel graphics retain the standard blue bricks throughout the game, leading to a lack of visual variety.

Lode Runner Legacy's strongest feature is the amount of game on offer. As well as 50 standard adventure stages, an Extra mode offers 20 more tough stages, Classic sports 150 Eighties levels, and Puzzle lets you run around 50 stages that don't feature any enemies, instead challenging your planning and strategy. There are also 30 stages available to play in local co-op mode, but for some reason there's no ability to play multiplayer online. If you somehow manage to exhaust all of that content, World mode allows you to download levels created by the online *Lode Runner Legacy* community.

The creation tools in the game really allow you to go all out. As well as designing new levels, you can add plenty of visual variety by designing new enemies and items to go with them for a themed look. Browsing the creations available online, we saw famous faces from Mega Man and Goro Majima to Optimus Prime, and even the elephant mascot of the Dendy range of Famiclones. As a result, those ubiquitous visuals present in the stages of the main game aren't so much of a problem once you get to exploring the World stages.

Sometimes you don't need to reinvent the wheel, and *Lode Runner Legacy* doesn't try. It gets by on offering a good representation of a classic game, and giving us all the content we could ever hope for. That's good enough for us.

>> Score **80%**

»[PS4] The chunky voxel look is a good fit for a game of this vintage, but variety would help.

»[PS4] Here's an example of the creative tools - here, you're being chased by dogs and have to collect footballs.

Devil May Cry 3 Special Edition

» **System:** Switch
» **Buy it from:** Online » **Buy it for:** £15.99

Want to feel old? *Devil May Cry 3* turned 15 in February. Capcom has given us something to take the edge off that revelation, though: a supercharged port of the demon-demolishing classic on Switch. While little has been done by the way of typical remastering, the devs have added smart quality-of-life improvements and flourishes that breathe life into this prequel. The first is an option to swap Dante's fighting styles on the fly; while originally you had to lock this in at the start of a mission – or find a statue mid-mission – now you can flick between Gunslinger, Swordmaster, Trickster and Royal Guard with a tap of the d-pad. A neat co-op mode rounds off this astonishing portable port.

>> Score **85%**

Sonic The Hedgehog

» **Studio:** Paramount
» **Cast:** Ben Schwartz, Jim Carrey, James Marsden

After having to flee his home world, Sega's speedy mascot (Ben Schwartz) has spent time hanging out on Earth – a situation that has worked out fine for him until he attracts the attention of the US government and its eccentric military scientist, Dr Robotnik (Jim Carrey). Enlisting the help of local cop Tom (James Marsden), Sonic goes on the run to try to escape to a safe world. The road trip plot is generic and the decision to set the movie on Earth means that game iconography is sparsely seen after the opening minutes, but the performances of the lead actors allow the film to breeze by. Schwartz portrays Sonic as endearingly naive rather than annoyingly cocky, and Carrey turns the clock back to the Nineties, stealing the show any time he's on-screen. It's no children's classic, but it is a pretty solid family action adventure movie.

Psikyo Shooting Stars Bravo

» **System:** Switch » **Buy it from:** Online, Retail
» **Buy it for:** £35.99 (£54.99)

It's a case of unfortunate timing for NIS America as its new compilation looks decidedly lacklustre next to Capcom's excellent new *Mega Man* collection. The good news is that all six games are of a very high standard, with the *Samurai Aces* trilogy being particularly fine. All three are entertaining horizontal shooters that offer a stiff challenge, while *Gunbird* and *Gunbird 2* take care of vertical shooting duties. The most tenuous connection, *Gunbarich*, actually turns out to be a lot of fun as well, being a weird *Gunbird* spin-off that features a number of *Breakout*-styled mechanics. Like last month's *Alpha* collection, it's let down by basic presentation, few enhancements and a rather high asking price.

>> Score **70%**

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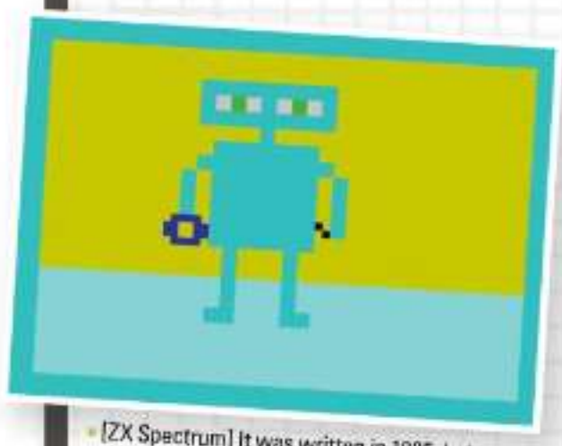
Gamers HOMEBREW

Brewing since 2005

[C64] *Super JumpKick Turbo 64* is being rewritten for the 8-bit Beat-'em-up/Fighter Dev Competition.

[Atari 8-bit] One of the winning ten-liner BASIC games from 2019, *Mini Bros.*



[ZX Spectrum] It was written in 1985, but *Aliengun* works in 2020 as a CSSCGC entry.

FIGHT, FIGHT, FIGHT!

The 8-Bit Beat-'em-up/Fighter Dev Competition 2020 is, as the slightly unwieldy name might suggest, a programming contest where the participants must create either a scrolling or one-on-one fighter. That title does allow for quite a bit of variety in the design, since entries can be anything from *International Karate*-style, single-screen battles to brawlers like *Streets Of Rage*, and the organisers have also clarified that something akin to *Smash Bros* (where the players can throw projectiles at each other to cause damage) would also qualify as a valid entry.

The people behind this competition are from the newly minted publisher Bitmap Soft in association with Puddle Software and, while there isn't much to see at the time of writing, the author of the beta release *Super JumpKick Turbo 64* on the Commodore 64 from 2016 has said that he's currently rewriting it and hopes to have a version ready before the event's deadline in early July. Fans of dishing out justice with their hands and feet should kick the pipe-wielding opponents behind Kikstart.me.uk/fighter-dev-2020 for more information.

The BASIC 10 Liners Contest is now a decade old, and it's still going strong with a range of categories for entries. Previous years have seen some truly impressive programs for a range of different systems – there were over a hundred contributions for the last iteration – and that looks set to continue in 2020 with the current crop of programs including a TRS-80 clone of *Space Invaders*, a basic – or indeed BASIC – flight simulation for the C64 and a text-based number guessing game on the Spectrum with a plot involving John '*Captain Crunch*' Draper. Along with the rules and entries over at Kikstart.me.uk/10-liners-2020 there's also an archive of contributions from the previous five instalments.

On a marginally less serious note, the Comp.Sys.Sinclair Crap Game Competition for this year is also under way and, as with previous instalments, the rules are pretty simple. Competitors need to produce a crap game for Sinclair's ZX Spectrum, ZX80 or ZX81 with the reward on offer for the worst entry apparently being 75p and a half-eaten packet of Rolos. There are always people who enter a game that's actually good, and the punishment for this heinous crime is potentially having to host the CSSCGC next year. All of the games submitted so far are at Kikstart.me.uk/csscgc-2020, and the deadline for entries is late December for anyone tempted to join in.

Gaming NEWS

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

HOMEBREW HEROES

Jason 'Kenz' Mackenzie started Psytronik in 1993. After a break, he returned in 2008 and has recently released his hundredth title, Shadow Over Hawksmill. We got in touch with this homebrew legend for a natter

A hundred releases is an impressive feat, did that milestone even seem possible when you first started out?
Back in 1993? No way! Heck, back then I struggled just to get the first four releases out the door! But once Psytronik was relaunched in 2008 the games just kept on coming. I made myself a promise once, that I would only stop publishing games when it stopped being fun – and to this day I still love doing it, so I guess I'll just keep going then… roll on the next 100!

Was covering more platforms than the C64 always part of the Psytronik plan?
It was always going to happen as I'm a fan of other machines like the Speccy, Amstrad, VIC-20, Plus/4 and Amiga. So when I was offered releases to publish on those systems I naturally jumped at the chance.

Which of Psytronik's releases have proved the most popular with gamers?
More recently, people have been loving the creative output from Lasse Öörni whose games like *Hessian* and *Steel Ranger* have proved to be really popular. The Icon64 team have also been putting out some real belters like *Legend Of Atlantis, Shadow Over Hawksmill, Age Of Heroes* and *Organism* etc. These guys are on a real roll! A special mention should also be made to Stefan Mader and his team behind recent Plus/4 games such as *Pets Rescue* and *Alpharay*. What these guys have managed to do with the hugely underrated CBM Plus/4 is, quite frankly, astonishing!

And are there any titles which have stood out for you personally over the years?
I still enjoy a good romp around the dingy dungeons of *Knight 'N' Grail*, which is still one of my all time favourite Psytronik releases. *Soulless* is another one I keep going back to, as is *Barnsley Badger* which is an enjoyable *Monty On The Run*-style game.

Finally, can you tell us a little about what's in store for Psytronik's future?
There's always lots of exciting projects bubbling away in the Psytronik lab, one of which I'm particularly looking forward to is *Soulless 2 – The Armour Of Gods*. The original *Soulless* was inspired by the C64 classics *Draconus* and *Impossible Mission* and the sequel will definitely appeal to fans of the *Sacred Armour Of Antiriad*! Another exciting development for Psytronik will be the release of Psytronik game soundtracks on vinyl. We've teamed up with Chiptune Records and plan to release a series of soundtracks presented in gorgeous gatefold LP packaging. The first soundtrack album to be made available will feature the music from the C64 game *Hessian*. Keep an eye on psytronik.net!

[C64] There's no chance of an early night in *Sceptre Of Baghdad*.

THE BIG INTERVIEW

A QUICK FLASH

[PC] Blasting away at scrolling shoot-'em-up *Alpha Force*, courtesy of Flashpoint.

Adobe announced in 2017 that it was discontinuing support for Flash at the end of this year. But what about all of those fun web-based games, including ones we've covered previously? Are they all going to be lost to the mists of time?

This is where Flashpoint comes in, with the ambitious goal of archiving these games – built on a range of web technologies – through a single launcher. There's more information at Kikstart.me.uk/flashpoint and, at the time of writing, over 36,000 games have already been preserved, with more coming.

[ZX81] A little bit like *Space Invaders*… but very hard and sideways.

BY YOUR COMMAND

Set in the *Battlestar Galactica* universe, Dr Beep's new ZX81 game sees a lone Viper up against a fleet of fast-moving Cylon fighters. The player's weaponry has suffered some damage, so it's fortunate that its opponents are in an even more battle-weary state and are unable to fire.

From the quick blast we've had with *Cylon Attack* it feels like a pared-down and rotated *Space Invaders* clone and, unfortunately, the difficulty has been set frustratingly high. Exceptionally brave pilots might still feel like giving it a blast at Kikstart.me.uk/cylon-zx81.

·DO YOU· REMEMBER?

It might be called *Columns 2*, but this game for the Atari ST has some tweaks to Sega's tile-matching formula which make it feel very different. For a start there's no time pressure since the incoming column of three tiles patiently waits at the top of the playfield for the player to decide what they want to do with it, so it isn't going to move until told.

Moving up and down on the joystick will rotate the tile stack vertically, left or right are used to position it over one of six columns and pressing fire will send the set downwards. These tweaks mean that, while the objective is still to form lines with three or more of the same colour, the gameplay here is more methodical. Head to Kikstart.me.uk/columns-2-st.

» [Atari ST] Planning ahead is important, even if it's easier said than done.

» [Atari ST] Lining up four of the cyan blocks for extra points.

» [MSX2] There are bodies strewn everywhere at the end of a level.

WHO DARES WINS

» **PLATFORM:** MSX2 » **DEVELOPER:** RETROFORCE » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.ME.UK/WHO-DARES-MSX2 » **PRICE:** FREE DOWNLOAD, €35 ON CARTRIDGE

They say that the first casualty of war is innocence, but after that point it's pretty much people being injured or killed and, in the world of *Who Dares Wins*, that means countless enemy soldiers are getting mown down. The commando under the player's control has two weapons available, with their primary gun having infinite ammunition to take out attackers that aren't hiding behind environmental obstacles. For those hard-to-reach targets and larger, more heavily armoured menaces – such as the tanks – there's also a limited stock of grenades which can be lobbed forwards with the second fire button.

Our hero's mission is spread out over eight stages which are only a few screens apiece, and moving to the next is a simple matter of getting to the top, but the battlefields themselves often become busy with troops and artillery already in place when the player appears, and more soldiers often turn up unexpectedly from the edges of the playfield.

This new version for MSX2 hardware is based on *Who Dares Wins 2* which was converted to the MSX in the Eighties, going via the Spectrum and misplacing the vertical scrolling of the C64 original along the way. Graphics and sound have received a lot of attention in order to take advantage of the more powerful hardware, and the developers have beefed up the presentation, including a series of cutscenes between stages which take on a darker tone as the mission progresses and our protagonist struggles to deal with the endless killing and their own fatigue.

It's only necessary to slaughter everybody on the final screen of each stage, but battle-hardened heroes can build their score up by blasting away elsewhere. Lobbing grenades at armoured vehicles before they leave the screen or taking out firing squads to prevent friendly soldiers from being shot will also help on that front, so it's beneficial to know where these opportunities are – something that can be picked up while learning the levels themselves, since that's essential to long-term survival.

» [MSX2] Mutual destruction after saving one captured soldier from a firing squad.

» [MSX2] Some of the screens are mazelike, so it helps to clear them of enemies.

>> Score **84%**

ESPITENEN UND HERR PIMPONEN

» **PLATFORM:** NES » **PRICE:** FREE
» **DEVELOPER:** THE MOJON TWINS
» KIKSTART.ME.UK/ESPITENEN-NES

» [NES] The skies are being patrolled by some remarkably grumpy birds.

Renowned explorer Herr Pimponen and the happy-go-lucky Espitenen are both in need of some help with exploring – the former because, as is often the case, he's hopelessly lost, and the latter as part of an intense game of hide-and-seek. By strange coincidence, both want to travel upwards through a series of fixed-speed scrolling worlds.

There are goodies to be gathered from the platforms while climbing, but getting too greedy can put the player's avatar in harm's way; they have some resilience to collisions with enemies, but falling or being knocked off the screen will immediately cost them a life.

There's lots of colourful graphics and jolly music to enjoy, but *Espitenen Und Herr Pimponen* also serves up some robust platforming action. Keeping a comfortable distance from death at the bottom of the playfield takes a combination of practice and skill.

>> Score **86%**

» [NES] These yellow chaps patrolling the platforms seem a little familiar?

THE SHADOW OVER HAWKSMILL

» **PLATFORM:** COMMODORE 64 » **DEVELOPER:** ICON64 AND PSYTRONIK
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.ME.UK/HAWKSMILL-C64
» **PRICE:** FROM $6.99 FOR DOWNLOAD TO £45 FOR COLLECTORS CARTRIDGE EDITION

Hawksmill is a quaint little village, or at least it was until a series of mysterious disappearances which left the local police baffled. Their call for assistance sees Inspector Black dispatched to help, but when he arrives a storm is brewing, and there are no signs of life anywhere. After a little searching around, the Inspector finds a key, only to disturb whatever was previously lurking in the shadows. Suddenly, there's lots of life around him, although none of it appears to be human.

The Shadow Over Hawksmill is a mixture of action platforming and puzzle solving, so simply running headlong into danger while releasing a hail of lead at whatever moves is pretty much guaranteed to end badly. Instead, a more cautious approach is required, along with some lateral thinking, and perhaps a little map making, since the caverns beneath Hawksmill are vast.

>> Score **89%**

» [C64] There's some signs of life, but they don't appear friendly. Or human.

RAYMAZE 2000

» **PLATFORM:** ATARI 8-BIT » **DEVELOPER:** NRV AND MRFISH
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.ME.UK/RAYMAZE-A8 » **PRICE:** FREE

It's a story as old as time, with a maze populated by round items to consume and enemies in pursuit, but this time around there aren't any hungry yellow balls or ghosts roaming the corridors. The inspiration is instead a Taito arcade game called *Raimais*, which has a futuristic setting, and there aren't any power pellets to be found either, instead temporary power-ups including shields and weapons are revealed as the dots are picked up.

Once all of the dots are cleared, the enemies disappear and exits will open, providing you with a choice as to which path to take. But this is a race against the clock, so that decision must be made before time runs out. The first couple of levels are pretty easy once the player acclimatises to the controls, but it soon becomes more challenging as the enemies get harder to evade and the mazes offer less room to manoeuvre.

>> Score **87%**

» [Atari 8-bit] Having a go at hiding in a corner to avoid patrolling nasties.

» [Atari 8-bit] Completing some of the screens will take a little lateral thinking.

» [C64] Because the first thing you think of when saving lives is 'trampoline'.

ROUNDUP

Does anybody fancy some classic Game & Watch action on their old-school 8-bit computer system? Well, we've got a couple of options for you to look into. The first is available for the Spectrum, called *ZX Parachute* and sees the player controlling a rowing boat which must be positioned to catch skydivers leaping from a helicopter before they fall into shark-infested water. Row over to Kikstart.me.uk/zx-parachute for more information.

There's more life-saving action with *Fire* on the C64, this time seeing two rescue workers using a trampoline to guide people as they plummet from a burning building towards the safety of a waiting ambulance. Putting aside the health and safety issues of flinging people into emergency vehicles, the download for this one is stashed away safely behind Kikstart.me.uk/fire-c64.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

TERRANIGMA

"I brought this off eBay a few years back, again I was late to the party on this one. [It's] quite expensive these days, but is worth the entry fee."

PAID: £140

FINAL FANTASY III

"I played this in the mid-Noughties. [It was] shamefully never released in the UK on the SNES so I had to rely on an import specialist to get the game."

PAID: £100

BIO

NAME:
Justin Hickman

LOCATION:
Midlands, UK

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
Super Nintendo

FAVOURITE GAME:
Super Mario World

CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

"I didn't play this until the mid-Noughties, and didn't own a complete copy until early 2010. This is, in my humble opinion the best Metroidvania ever created."

PAID: £80

HIT THE RESET BUTTON

How do you rebuild a collection after it's been destroyed by a flood?

If Justin Hickman's face is familiar to you it's because we've featured him in Collector's Corner before. The reason we're showcasing his collection again is because he effectively had to rebuild part of it when his game room was flooded by eight inches of water shortly after it was featured in issue 145. Justin told us that over 250 games were badly damaged, including several consoles, an arcade machine and numerous gaming peripherals. "I had to act quickly, jumping in and grabbing what I could from all the low-level shelves, placing them to one side to drip dry whilst I used a bucket to remove all the excess water from the room," Justin tells us, recalling the kind of nightmare that would terrify most collectors.

Although many of the games Justin lost were easy to replace, he did lose a few precious items, including his "beautiful boxed C64 and Spectrum" alongside the aforementioned arcade machine. That sort of damage would have been enough to kill the spirit of most collectors. "I was quickly becoming despondent and it may have killed [my] passion stone dead!" Justin remarks. Everything changed when he saw the catastrophe as a way to rebuild his collection, and things were further helped out by a very understanding insurance company. "If anyone takes anything away from this story, please check and make sure you are correctly covered with house insurance when it comes to your videogame collection," continues Justin.

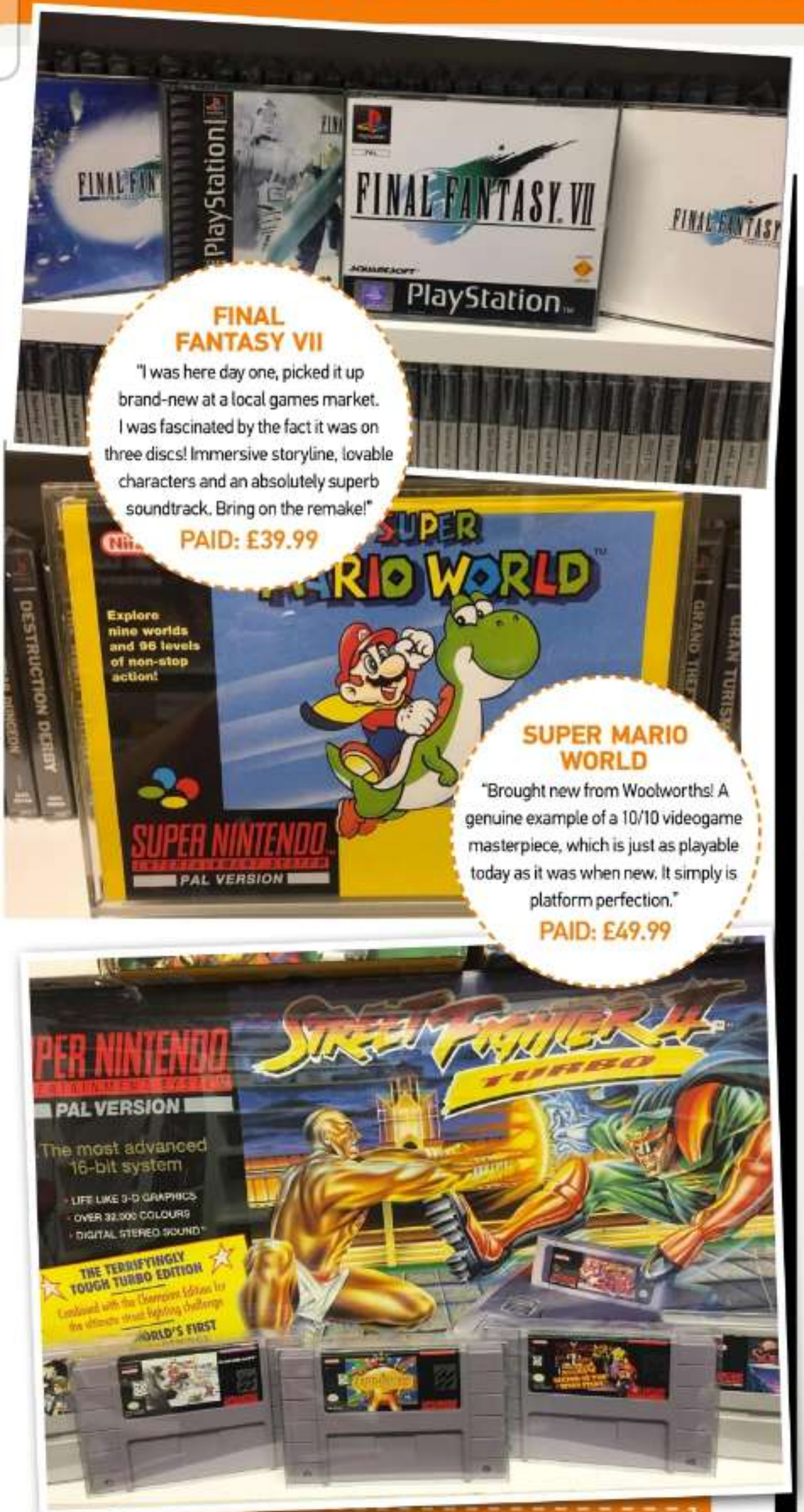
Many collectors initially boost their collections with bulk buys and Justin is no different. As a result he discovered he had many games he didn't need, and he soon began to cut those titles from what would eventually become his new collection. "This process, to my surprise, became quite therapeutic," he tells us, "and I would urge anyone with a large collection to review and consider the same, especially when space becomes a premium! Shake the tree and lose the deadwood!"

For Justin that meant continuing to stay away from complete collections, even if he is a massive SNES fan. "I am not a fan of spending large chunks of cash on sub-par games just to complete a console set," he tells us. Instead, he decided to focus on replacing any cherished games that had been damaged and focus on certain franchises instead. "I now have full – or close to full – sets for many game franchises including *Zelda*, *Castlevania*, *Final Fantasy*, *Fire Emblem* and *Mario*," he tells us, although he admits that "collecting genres is a little more tricky".

While Justin didn't reveal how much it has cost him to replace games in his collection, he says, "I try my best to avoid spending large chunks of cash, though I have been known to pull the trigger in moments of weakness." As he continues to restore his collection, he says that *Panzer Dragoon Saga* is one title that he'd love to own. "I have had a few chances to acquire this beauty and 'noped' out every time," he concludes. "It's so expensive! If anyone want's to do me a deal..."

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com



FINAL FANTASY VII

"I was here day one, picked it up brand-new at a local games market. I was fascinated by the fact it was on three discs! Immersive storyline, lovable characters and an absolutely superb soundtrack. Bring on the remake!"

PAID: £39.99

SUPER MARIO WORLD

"Brought new from Woolworths! A genuine example of a 10/10 videogame masterpiece, which is just as playable today as it was when new. It simply is platform perfection."

PAID: £49.99

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

SUPER NINTENDO

■ "My original Super Nintendo has valiantly stood the test of time and just keeps on going! As fresh and playable today as it was when new, and home to some of the best games ever made. Need I go on?"

PAID: NOTHING (IT WAS A GIFT)

BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

MEGA DRIVE AND SUPER NINTENDO

If you're interested in reliving the 16-bit rivalry from this issue, it's relatively easy to do. You can buy an unboxed Mega Drive starting at **£25** with a SNES selling for roughly the same price. Both consoles command a higher price when boxed, and prices largely vary based on the amount of games sold with them.

ROBOCOP VS THE TERMINATOR

The price for this action game varies depending on the system. Complete versions start from **£15** for Master System, **£25** for Game Gear, **£30** for Mega Drive, **£35** for Game Boy and **£40** for SNES. Cart-only listings for all systems are considerably cheaper.

URIDIUM

The cassette version of Andrew Braybrook's shooter sells for between **£1.50** and **£9**. A more expensive disk double pack that includes *Paradroid* recently sold for **£50**.

THE SKIDMARKS SERIES

The original Amiga game is still relatively cheap and sells between **£1** and **£6**. The sequel is slightly pricier and ranges from **£4 to £12**, with the expansion going for **£1 to £15**.

HEXEN

Shadow Of The Serpent Riders, the expanded version of *Heretic* can be found on CD-ROM for **£30**. A compilation featuring all the games in the series, called *Towers Of Darkness*, sells for **£100**.

ANIMAL CROSSING

The original N64 game is Japanese only, so steer clear of it. The GameCube edition is the one to buy, but prices are rising and it now sells between **£35** and **£70** if it's complete with the memory card.

HOW MUCH?!

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: MAJORA'S MASK

A sealed, VGA-approved red strip version of the acclaimed N64 game recently sent buyers into a frenzy. While it started off at **£32**, feverish bidding by 14 collectors drove the price to a staggering **£2,049**.

Prices correct at time of print

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

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STAR LETTER

HALTING HOSTILITIES

Dear Sir,
Is it just me now I'm older, or has console rivalry cooled off somewhat these days?

I well remember the times when there were bitter arguments on whether the PlayStation was greater than the Nintendo, or, going back further, the Amiga bettered the Atari ST. While at school, there were even rival groups of C64 and Spectrum owners who hung about in gangs and never missed the opportunity to diss the other machine. It was almost like a football derby whenever they met!

Perhaps these things change with the times and are especially blunted now tolerance and understanding seem to be common topics in our way of life. This is obviously a good thing.

While our grandfathers and older generations may have fought each other during the Forties, many are now friends who simply reminisce about those dark days. They are happy to let bygones be bygones.

Could it be that most console users now feel the same way?
D O'Conner

It's interesting that you write this to us now. We've definitely noticed a cooling of tempers over the years, and a lot of that is down to the way that business has changed. The differences between machines have vanished into irrelevance – where the C64 and Spectrum versions of *Chase HQ* were incredibly different, the Xbox One version of the latest *Need For Speed* is almost indistinguishable from its PS4 counterpart. With that being the case, getting worked up about minor differences in lighting effects seems like nerdish pedantry.

Plus, where *Sega Power* and *Total!* might have been happy to throw jabs at each other's machines, we'd guess the console manufacturers don't want their official publications mentioning the opposition at all – and they certainly don't put out the same sort of attack ads. It was fun at the time, but we don't mind the cultural change.

» System rivalry seems to have died down a bit in recent years, is that because the tech is now largely the same?

» [PlayStation] Yes, Resident Evil 3 is great – and it's solely because Nemesis is a big scary bastard.

BLOW UP THE MOON

Dear **RG,**
Could *Resident Evil 3* be considered a classic, or is it the red-headed stepson of the family, so to speak? Will any of the flood of retro-inspired, largely if not completely plagiarised, items coming out of China nowadays ever become collectible? What can you tell me about the game *Aztec* on the Apple II? Why hasn't Iain Lee written a funny book about retro gaming yet? Will a mini Amiga console ever come out? Why did my brother never let me play on his Super Nintendo, but happily allowed me to help myself to his Tiger handheld game collection?

Please answer any or all of these pressing questions for a school assignment I don't have.
Robert Roemer

Well, that's a mixed bag of questions, Robert! We'd say *Resident Evil 3* is a classic – it's definitely better than some other classic-style *Resi* games that followed it, and has one of the series' best monsters that still sends chills down our spines today. Completely plagiarised gaming goods from China have been collectible for a while now, as some people just love Famiclones. So we'd guess some of the current crop will end up the same way. *Aztec* is an Apple II game created by Paul Stephenson and published by Datamost in 1982, which hasn't yet been covered in Retro Gamer.

We'd imagine poor Iain is too busy hosting his radio show and regularly streaming on Twitch to write an entire book. Though we haven't heard anything about a mini Amiga, we'd be surprised if Cloanto doesn't want to make one happen, given the success of the Commodore 64-based systems. You should probably ask your brother, but if it were us letting our younger siblings play on the Super Nintendo, we'd be worried about them overwriting our *Super Mario World* saves.

TECH TALK IS TOP

Hi **RG,**
Regarding Phil Richardson's letter published in issue 204… I'm the opposite case. If I'm really honest, I tend to skip about a third of the mag because it's a narrative piece on someone who worked in the Eighties UK software industry and the games they produced, or similar, and I find those hard to relate to as someone

» Sometimes it's about the guys behind the games, sometimes it's about the guts under the hood. We'll always look at both.

CONTACT US

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Email: retrogamer@futurenet.com

who just missed out on that golden era. I feel like you're hitting a sweet spot right now and don't need to change the formula, but for what it's worth, the tech stuff is the reason I keep subbing and in theory it's much more era-independent. I'd even love it if you went deeper into stuff like the Super Scaler and Mode 7. Or maybe a feature on MiSTer...?

Keep up the amazing work!

Ben Ahmady

Hi Ben, thanks for writing in. Both your letter and Phil's do a great job of illustrating that Retro Gamer is a tricky magazine to balance, as everyone is interested in different formats, different aspects of the hobby, and even different types of magazine features. Some people are interested in personality-driven stories, other people love to hear about the technology and feats of coding behind classic games. Some might just like to nostalgically look at the screenshots. Like with anything we produce, we'll always strive to provide a mixture of content that keeps the broadest selection of readers happy. As for MiSTer, we think FPGA technology is fascinating and we're considering the best way to feature it.

HOW TO PLAY CONSOLE CLASH

UK readers and subs will have noticed a themed extra with this issue! *Console Clash* is a card game in which players do battle using 32 consoles from the past, taking in towering triumphs, cult classics and major missteps. Consoles are scored for their age, aesthetic design, feature innovation, the official controller and for Retro Cred – which you lot decided with your votes for the greatest games systems in issue 177.

Recommended for 2-4 players

To start the game:

- Shuffle the deck and deal out an even number of cards to each player. Leave any remainders to one side.
- Each player collects their cards, and may only look at the top card of their pile at any time.
- Decide who is the first active player using rock paper scissors etc.

Playing the game

- The active player chooses a category from their top card; the same category can't be picked next by any player.
- All players put their cards face-up in the middle of the table. The winning card is the one with the earliest year, or the highest grade/number in other categories.
- The player whose card won takes all the cards on the table and adds them to their winnings, then becomes the active player.
- If two cards share the same high value, the cards stay on the table to be won in the next turn. The active player doesn't change.
- If there are cards left to play, the active player starts a new turn.

Ending the game

- Once all cards have been played, the player with the most cards in their winnings pile scores a point. If there is a tie, each tied player gets a point.
- The player who won the least cards starts the next round as active player.
- The first player to score three points is crowned the winner.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Console Clash

Honestly, you wouldn't believe the amount of time we've spent on this little card game – everything from the selection of systems to include to the way we graded each category was the subject of great debate, and that's before we even got to actually testing the game. Even then, a healthy round of last-minute arguments over scoring left us with a final set of adjustments to make. Justifications and counter-justifications were thrown about, and with everyone getting involved it took us right up to the printing deadline. Needless to say, we stand by everything – including the CD32's relatively okay design.

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know...

It's war! Mega Drive or SNES?

Ben Boyd
Mega Drive – it might not have had the calibre of RPGs that the SNES had, but in every other game genre it was superior. It could cope with faster gameplay and was home to more mature content. Sure, it lacked Mode 7 and had less audio channels and on-screen colours, but this didn't stop it having some of the most visually impressive and amazing sounding games, many of which eclipse the best looking and sounding games on the SNES.

Crusty Starfish
I'm not historically a Nintendo fan but out of the Mega Drive or SNES it has to be the SNES. I had a mate with a Mega Drive with loads of rubbish beat-'em-ups (I don't like them) and a mate with a SNES and *Super Bomberman* and that was frigging awesome!

NoizeNation
Sega – because everyone had a Sega console. It had Sonic in the fastest game around, and all Nintendo had was a fat plumber in a terrible game. Only posh kids had a Nintendo.

Mark Cooke
Nintendo. Sega sucked! That Mega Drive joypad was an ugly unsightly beast, whereas the SNES controller was beautiful and fit your hands perfectly.

RuySan
Sega. I feel that the Mega Drive besides looking so much cooler than the Super Nintendo, has a much more diverse library. Also, Sega's own IPs are more varied. Nintendo usually plays very safe with their games.

MY MODE 7 HANDS AND SUPER FX PUNCH WILL HAVE YOU SPINNING!
MATE WHERE'S YOUR CD ADD-ON? HERE'S A 32-BIT MUSHROOM YOU SUPER NO-FRIENDS!!

» Of course, not everyone has laid down their rifles – this drawing was sent to us by reader Mike Harley.

Paul - PharaohTV
It's all Nintendo for me. Everything Nintendo puts out is amazing. Sonic is alright but it's no Italian plumber bustin' Goombas, jumping on Koopas and taking the fight to land, sea and air! Plus Nintendo has the most iconic characters in all of videogame history! Get N or get out!

PalicoPadge
SNES for sure! *Mario World, F-Zero, Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts, Street Fighter II, A Link To The Past*... and that's only in its first year released in Europe! But being able to play *Killer Instinct*, one of my favourite arcade games at home, is why the SNES wins.

Reinier Vreeswijk
Mega Drive! Had the best shmups! Also *Streets Of Rage 2* was better than *Final Fight*, and of course *Mortal Kombat* WITH blood!

retro GAMER

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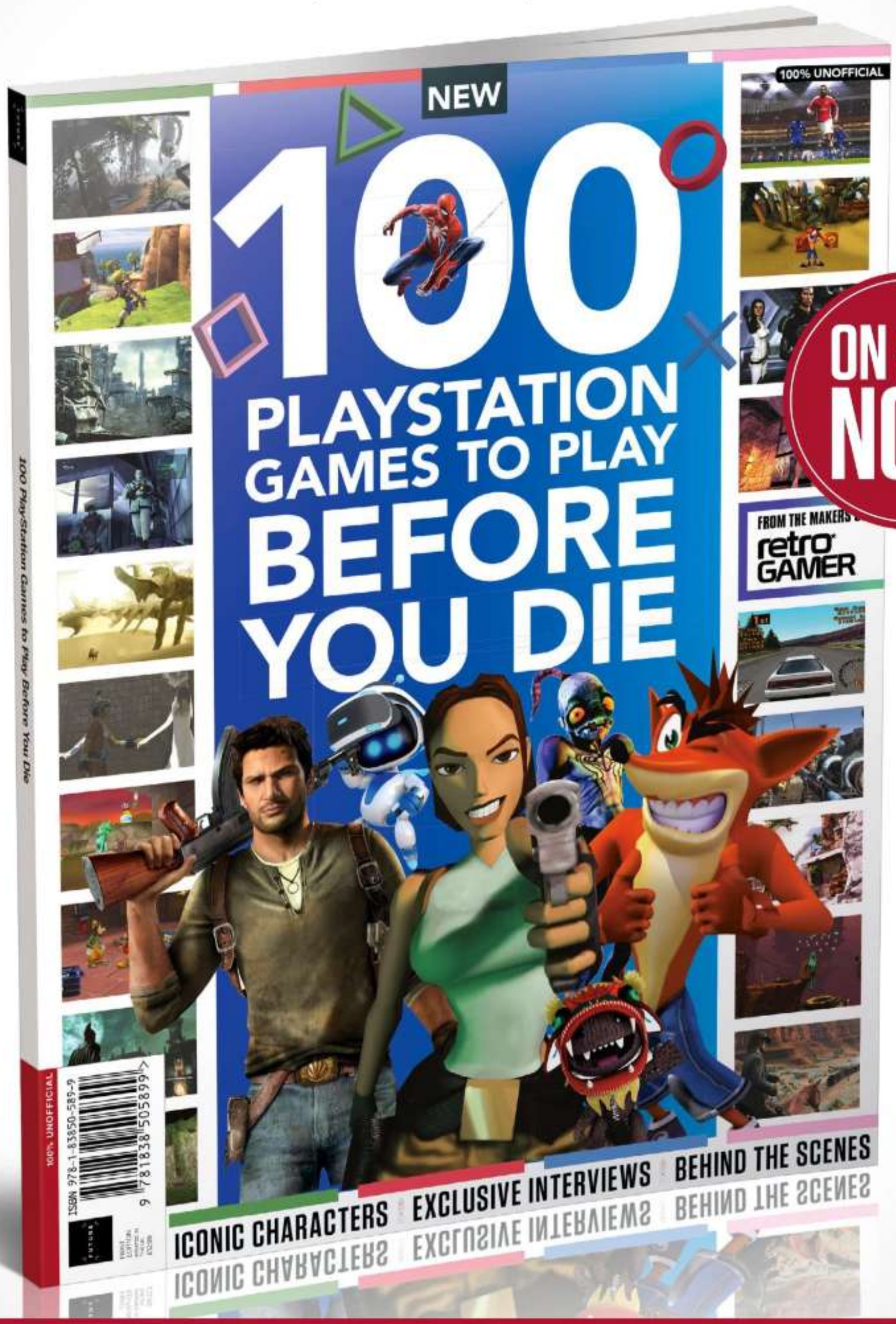

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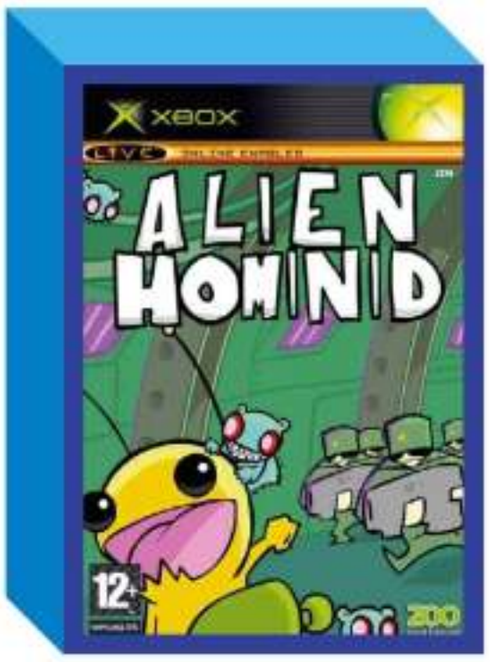


ALIEN HOMINID

» Occasionally, when things aren't going our way, we like to hope for some sort of entirely unrealistic intervention. One of our favourites is an alien invasion, and this 2D run-and-gun gives you a good idea of what we'd envision – unrestrained laser blasts, head-chomping and general mayhem. There is an actual reason for all this carnage, and that's the alien's effort to recover his spaceship, so let's skip to the end and see if he succeeds...

01

» Having fallen an extremely long way, our little yellow buddy falls flat on his face, like this was some sort of cartoon or something. Come on man, don't you know you originate from a Flash game, not a Saturday morning TV show?

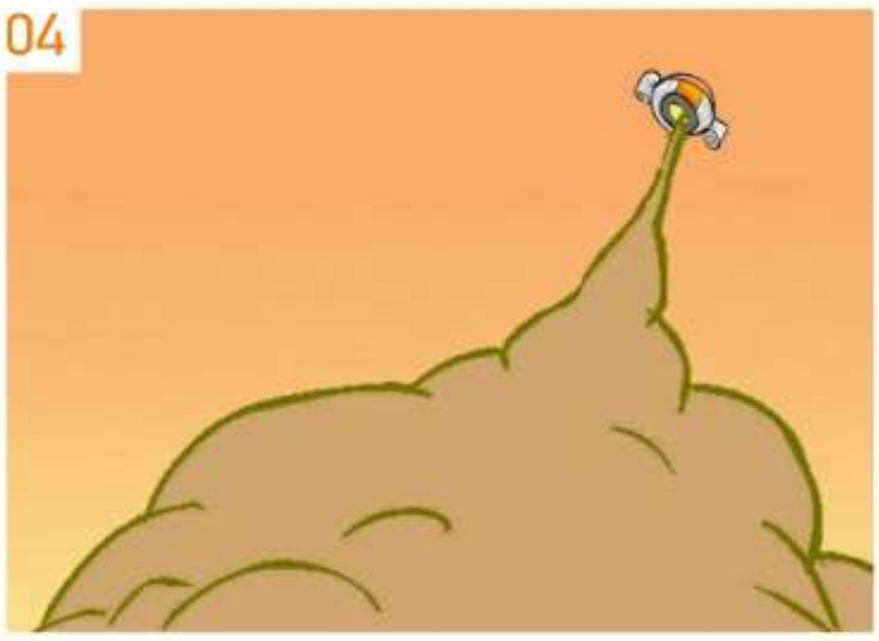
02

» A trio of helpful dude bros arrive in a truck up and carry the limp body of the alien back to his ship. Meanwhile, the massed forces of the military watch on in disbelief as humans help this extraterrestrial menace.

03

» With helicopters ready to strike at any moment, a hat wearer pops the interplanetary interloper back into his spaceship and closes the roof. However, he does find the time to turn and give a final salute to the alien antihero.

04



» The alien comes around just in time to see this, before blasting his way back into space – the dude bro having pushed the big green launch button as he placed the alien in his seat. We hope he didn't need a safety belt at that kind of speed, as he definitely wasn't wearing one.

05

» Still being pursued by military helicopters, our trio of fearless bros in baseball caps drive off in their truck. However, they quickly become a duo as one of them is lifted out of his seat by a tractor beam, losing his hat in the process. He should've worn his seatbelt...

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